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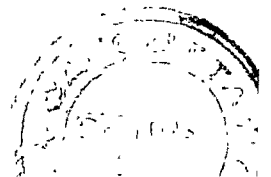
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**THE RICE MILLING INDUSTRY IN BENGAL, 1920-1950 :
A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF MECHANIZATION
ON THE LOCAL PEASANT ECONOMY***

SMRITI KUMAR SARKAR

In the predominantly agricultural economy of Bengal with rice as its staple crop, introduction of machinery for hulling rice was an important development. The new enterprise, using new techniques, and competing with the pervasive traditional system of hand-pounding of rice,¹ had brought about significant changes in rural Bengal, comparable to those produced by the introduction of cotton yarn and twist and the importation of machine-made cloths in Bengal in the early decades of the nineteenth century. As the new industry of rice-milling grew, the existing modes of dehusking of rice gradually fell into disuse. The rice mill, therefore, reduced a considerable employment opportunity requiring little skill and low cost inputs. Above all, hand pounding of rice had a unique role in the traditional village society. Soon the rice mill emerged as the largest dealer of the crop, buying paddy from the cultivator either directly or through a convenient network and selling the finished rice to the most favourable market. The rice mill also served as a new credit agency largely replacing the traditional one in the paddy/rice trade and also as a source of credit to cultivators. The result was a reorganization of the existing structure of rice trade and an increasing integration of the rice-producing villages with the wider commodity markets.

This paper is divided into five parts :

- I. The Rice Milling Industry in Bengal.
- II. Rice Mill and the Question of rural unemployment.
- III. Rice Mill and the Question of paddy/rice trade.
- IV. Rice Mill and the paddy growing peasantry.
- V. Conclusion.

* I am grateful to my research supervisor, Professor B. B. Chaudhuri, Department of History, Calcutta University, for his elaborate comments on the two earlier drafts of this paper.

I

I : 1. Growth of the industry : Pattern

1 : 1 Early History :

The mechanical processing of rice had started in Bengal sometime in the early nineteenth century with small hullers operated by steam engines. The earliest reference to the rice husking machine in Bengal appears in *Samachar Darpan* as early as in March 1826.²

“তত্ত্বল সম্পাদক নতন যন্ত্ৰ। অৰ্থাৎ ধানভানা কল। ১৫ ফেব্রুৱাৰি বুধবাৰ এণ্ডিকলটিউৱৰ সোঁসৈয়টি অৰ্থাৎ কৃষি বিদ্যাৰ বিষয়ক সমাজেৰ এক সভা হইয়াছিল। ঐ সভায় ডেবিড স্কট সাহেব কৰ্তৃক প্ৰেৰিত কাঠ নিৰ্মিত ব্ৰহ্মদেশে ব্যবহৃত তত্ত্বল-নিষ্পাদক একপ্ৰকাৰ যন্ত্ৰ অৰ্থাৎ ঝাতাকল সকলে দৰ্শন কৰিলেন ঐ যন্ত্ৰে প্ৰতিদিন কেবল দুইজন লোকে ১০ দশ মোন তত্ত্বল প্ৰস্তুত কৰিতে পাৰে তাহাৰ এক জন কল লাড়ে ইহাতে পৰস্পৰ প্ৰান্তিযুক্ত হইলে ঐ কৰ্মেৰ পৰিবৰ্তন কৰে : এতদ্দেশে ঢেংকি যন্ত্ৰে তিন জনে বিনা অৰ্দ্ধমোনেৰ অধিক তত্ত্বল হওয়া দুষ্কৰ আৰ তাহাৰা পৰিপ্ৰাপ্ত হইলেই ঢেংকি বন্ধ হয়।”

‘(Rice-producing new machine or the rice-husking device. A meeting of the Agriculture Society was held on Wednesday, 15 Feb, where the members observed the rice husking machine, used in Burma and sent by David Scott. It required only two persons to produce ten maunds of rice a day. One of them operated the machine and the other poured paddy into it. They interchanged their work at intervals, while the indigenous *Dhenki* with the help of three men could hardly produce half a maund of rice per day and when they felt tired the *Dhenki* stopped.)’

It is not known whether Mr. Scott’s machine became popular in Bengal. As early as 1845, however, Bengal came to have a few small rice-husking machines, driven by steam engines. The *Friend of India* (27 November, 1845) stated that there were altogether 150 steam engines in Bengal, some of which were engaged in hulling rice.³ These machines, on their first arrival in Calcutta, did not evoke any response from *Goladars*, *Aratdars* and such other persons connected with the wholesale rice trade. However, Zamindars and the bhadralog people procured them in such a great number as led a contemporary observer to conclude that the machine would shortly put the conventional *Dhenki* out of use. The small initial capital outlay and the high profit potentiality of the new venture had perhaps encouraged them to buy these machines. His apprehension

however proved wrong. The machines were very soon abandoned as junk.⁴ The improper selection of the sites, and, above all, the social prejudice against consuming machine-husked rice stood in the way of their success.⁵

1 : 2 Beginning :

The successful commercial application of rice hullers in Bengal started sometime in the 1890's, with *Goladars*, *Aratdars* and the big rice exporting houses of Calcutta buying these machines to facilitate their export trade. Unlike the pioneers in this field these men were intimately connected with the rice trading network of Bengal. Since most of them were directly engaged in the export trade they had not to depend on the local demand for the milled rice. This explains why in the early years the mechanized rice-husking was concentrated mainly in two places : Ramkristopur, the great rice mart of Howrah and where most of the *Rarhi* rice was assembled for export, and Chetlah, Calcutta's largest centre of trading in 'Purbi' rice.⁶

Ramkristopur in Howrah had its first rice huller in 1899 and within two to three years the number increased to seven.⁷ The commercial viability of these machines soon encouraged rice traders of other places to install them. For instance, Chetlah, which did not have any such machine in the late nineteenth century,⁸ came to have a number of them in 1906, when these machines had also spread to Salkia in Howrah.⁹ Thus L.S.S.O'Malley had observed in 1909 that mechanical husking of rice constituted a new industry.¹⁰ Use of rice hullers had also spread to other centres. In fact, by 1910 use of this machine had increased to such an extent that Rakhaldas Khan of Salkia in Howrah had started manufacturing rice hullers and sold them at a price less than half of that of an imported huller. That he was highly successful in this venture was evident from his subsequent plan of producing different varieties of rice hullers and their accessories.¹¹

The large-scale commercial rice mill with a higher level of mechanization of the process of rice-husking came long after the introduction of rice hullers.¹² The multipurpose mill on the Strand Road of Calcutta, referred to in the *Samachar Darpan* (1 September,

1827), was primarily a flour mill, designed to meet the growing demand for wheat and flour in the city.¹³ In 1883 there were in Bengal altogether 696 boilers, of which six were in two rice mills.¹⁴ But these were smaller units and were unlikely to have sheller-type engines of the latter days.¹⁵ B. P. Adarkar in his report on the rice mills stated that in 1903 Bengal had only one registered rice mill employing 33 persons.¹⁶ By 1910 the number of such mills increased to three.¹⁷

1 : 3 Growth :

The large-scale rice milling industry in Bengal had its real growth since the second decade of the twentieth century. The Holland Commission thus noted in 1918 : "in the towns the work of paddy-pounding is being more and more performed by the power-driven mills".¹⁸ The number of the medium-sized mills employing more than twenty persons increased from 24 in 1911 to 104 in 1921. Out of a total of 137 mills in 1921, only two mills had more than one hundred employees.¹⁹ The number of registered rice mills in Bengal rose to 35 in 1916, 40 in 1918, and 80 in 1920. Similarly, the size of the workforce engaged in this industry also expanded from a mere 33 in 1903, to 1531 in 1916, 2039 in 1918 and 3604 in 1920. The industry, therefore, had a growth of 470% between 1911 and 1921, and 129% between 1921 and 1930, in terms of the number of registered rice mills. The total strength of workers engaged in the registered sector of the industry had increased by nearly 700% during the period between 1916 and 1930.²⁰

From the second decade of the twentieth century the industry had throughout maintained its rate of growth till the mid-1930's, when the rate slowed. The number of rice mills increased from 315 in 1930 to 381 in 1936 or only by 20%, plummeting to a further low of 5% growth rate between 1936 and 1939.²¹ Though it could no longer regain the steady growth rate of the earlier decades, the industry showed signs of a marginal recovery in the early 1940's. Thus the rice mills had an increase of 12.5% during the short span of 1939 to 1944,²² — a trend which continued even after the partition of the province. Thus West Bengal had 350 rice mills in 1949-1950, which increased to 403 or by 15.14% during 1950 to 1955 period.²³

- During all these decades, right from the beginning of the twentieth century, the unregistered sector of the industry, i.e., the small rice-husking units employing less than ten persons and using huller type engines, had a tremendous growth. The proprietary nature of these concerns and the poor employment rate, ranging from five to ten and a still lower number in some cases, kept them away from the purview of the Indian Factories Act. It is, therefore, difficult to know the exact number of these small rice-husking units. The available data, however, suggest that these machines spread to all parts of the province, reaching to such a remote corner as Arambag in the district of Hooghly, which had as many as ten such units in 1929.²⁴ In fact by the 1920's the use of this small rice-husking machine in Bengal had increased to such an extent that in some areas it had the look of a new cottage industry.²⁵ For instance, at Kumartuli in Calcutta nearly every house had this machine fitted with an electric motor, husking rice for the Teli mahajans of the place.²⁶ A study of small rice husking units employing less than ten persons of West Bengal estimated the number of the power-driven hullers at 1429 in 1951-1952, as against 350 large rice mills in 1949-1950.²⁷ The number of such units increased to 5000 in 1955, when there were only 403 big rice mills in the province.²⁸ The unusual increase (71.42%) in the number of hullers during the period 1950 to 1955 was largely due to the refugee rehabilitation programme. Under that scheme the provincial government had distributed soft loans among the displaced persons for the purchase of these machines.²⁹

1 : 4 Changing size Pattern :

A considerable expansion in the scale of production occurred in the registered sector of the industry during the early part of our period. B. P. Adarkar in his study on the labour conditions in the rice mills stated that in 1903 Bengal had only one rice mill employing 33 persons. Assuming this as the basic size of the work force per unit of rice mill we have made below an attempt to illustrate the pattern of the changing size of the industry. It should be noted here that since the production process up to the stage of hulling, even in the big rice mills was labour-intensive,³⁰ any major change in the size of the workforce, engaged in the industry, would suggest a

change in its scale of production. This was particularly true of the rice mills in Bengal which, requiring sun-drying of boiled paddy, could not work on more shifts than one. It is only towards the end of our period that certain improved appliances, mechanizing the entire process of steaming, boiling, drying and husking, were introduced in the industry, causing a further expansion in the scale of production.

The table [No : I] below indicates that between 1903 and 1939 the basic size of the workforce engaged in the industry under study

Table - I

*Change in the Average Size Pattern of the
Rice Mills in Bengal, 1903 - 1939.*

Year	No. of the registered Rice Mills	Total No. of persons employed	Basic size of the workforce	Change in the size pattern
1	2	3	4	5
			(2 × 33)	(3 - 4)
1903	1	33	33	-
1916	35	1531	1155	376
1918	40	2039	1320	719
1920	80	3604	2640	964
1922	101	4023	3333	690
1924	132	6185	4356	1829
1926	235	9711	7755	1956
1928	286	10778	9438	1340
1930	315	12225	10395	1830
1932	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1934	343	13509	11319	2190
1936	381	16305	12573	3732
1938	411	18635	13563	5072
1939	400	18742	13200	5542

Source : Adarkar B. P. : *Report on Labour Conditions in the Rice Mills. Delhi, 1946, pp. 28 - 29. (For Columns 1 to 3.)*

had expanded by nearly 12 times, while the average size pattern of the rice mill grew by 15 times.

1 : 5 The Economic Depression, the War and the Partition :

It has been stated earlier that the industry had a slow growth during the 1930's. Thus 13 rice mills or nearly 28% of the working units went on liquidation during the single year of 1935-36, all of which were jointstock companies.⁸¹ In Bolpur, for instance, out of the eighteen rice mills of the town two were closed in the early 1930's. Hashim Amir Ali, in his study of the rice industry of lower Birbhum, related this depressed state of the industry to the declining agricultural prices of the period.⁸²

The industry suffered further reverses during the War years. The imposition of control by the Government on food grains in 1942 helped rice mills to grow faster in other parts of India, viz. Madras, Andhra and Mysore. In these states rice mills alone had been licensed to act as procurement agents of the Government to the total exclusion of private traders. The rice mills also benefited from the Government decision to mill the entire quantity of the procured paddy through them.⁸³ But this did not happen in Bengal. Here rice mills during the war period generally suffered from a falling volume of business caused by inadequate supplies of paddy.⁸⁴ The contention of the Bengal Rice Mills Association that the fall was of the order of more than 50 percent of the per-war average was obviously exaggerated.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, a fall in the volume cannot be denied.

The falling volume of business was largely due to rice mills' failure to procure the necessary amount of paddy. The Government of Bengal had authorised both rice mills and private traders to procure paddy under licence. The main procurement areas in Bengal were fairly well served by rice mills and it was these rice mills which served as the main procurement agency in their respective areas. The Food grains control order of the Government of India (May 1942) and its subsequent imposition here by the provincial Government (18th November 1942), therefore, did not very much restrict the scope of paddy procurement by rice mills, though it involved some changes in their system of procurement.

The failure of the rice mills in general to procure their requisite quantities of paddy was due to several reasons. Firstly the control period in Bengal, in fact all over Eastern India, was characterized by a fall in the marketable surplus of paddy. This served to reduce the size of the pool on which rice mills could draw for the supply of their paddy. The fall in the marketable surplus thus in its turn served to check the normal flow of paddy to rice mills.

Secondly, the control period was also characterized by an increasing tendency towards evasion of procurement and bypassing of the control market. In spite of an increasing resort to requisitioning it was not wholly possible to prevent the diversion of supplies to the private market. Thus to the extent that this procurement tended to be evaded the normal flow to the mill diminished. Under the Bengal Rice Mills Control Order, 1943, rice mills were required to sell their entire output of rice at prices fixed by the Government for the different districts to the Chief Agents functioning in their respective areas. This chief agency system was bitterly resented by the rice millers of Bengal.⁸⁶ However, throughout the control period, this remained the most important means of Government procurement. As such, rice mills could not participate in processing the paddy finding its way to the private market.

Thirdly, the system of cordoning the surplus districts nearly stopped the inter-district movement of paddy. The flow of paddy from the neighbouring provinces like Orissa and Bihar already ceased with the erection of interprovincial barriers in July 1942.⁸⁷ The Calcutta mills were worst affected by it.

Fourthly, mills located in the surplus districts also did not fare better. During the control period rice mills received their paddy from two sources: their own purchases from the rural area and sales by Government of the paddy procured by it to mills at a fixed rate on the condition that it would receive back the milled rice at a fixed price.⁸⁸ The procurement programme often failed and as such the supply from the second source was always uncertain. The rice mill's freedom to buy paddy from growers was considerably restricted by the compulsion that its entire output had to be sold to the Government agent. In the context of the widening gap between procurement prices and market prices⁸⁹ the rice mill could not

afford to buy in the dear market, since it was obliged to sell the commodity at the pre-fixed price.

The crisis of the rice milling industry in Bengal during these critical years of control is also indicated by the growing attempt on the part of rice millers to unite to defend their cause. Thus in 1942, the Calcutta Rice Mills Association was set up to take over the work of the North Calcutta Rice Mills Association, the Marwari Rice Mills Association, the Tolleygunj Rice Mills Association and Barrackpur Rice Mills Association. A few years later the Bengal Rice Mills Association was established to represent the interest of the industry over the province as a whole.⁴⁰

The partition of Bengal in 1947 most adversely affected the rice milling industry of the province. The crisis had its real origin in the nature of the distribution of the industry in Bengal, which is analysed later.

In sum although the rice milling industry was relatively more widely distributed all over the province than most other important industries of Bengal, western districts of Bengal had a larger concentration of mills. For instance, in 1944-45, of the Bengal districts, which later formed parts of East Pakistan, only Dinajpur, Bogura, Bakarganj and Rajshahi had rice mills of any importance. The collective share of these districts again in the total rice mills of Bengal was only 4.66%. Thus out of a total of 497 rice mills, which were in existence at the time of the partition, 418 or 84 per cent fell to the share of West Bengal.⁴¹ In 1947, therefore, the industry faced an acute crisis of raw material supply, similar to that which the jute manufacturing industry of the state had faced. Because, the supplies of paddy from the eastern districts to Calcutta was already dislocated during the critical years of control. The chances of an early resumption of supplies from that region to Calcutta was totally lost with the Partition. By this time the supplies from the neighbouring province of Orissa also nearly ceased. And the supplies of paddy from Burma had already stopped in the early 1940's.⁴² The situation was further worsened by the steady growth in the number of rice hullers in the 1950's, as noticed earlier.

The severity of the crisis was felt most painfully by the units located in and around Calcutta, which led to the closure of a good

number of such mills in the mid-1950's, while a few others went on liquidation.⁴³ In a representation to the Minimum Wages Advisory Committee the Calcutta Rice Mills' Association attributed this closure and liquidation to two main difficulties faced by the Calcutta Mills: unequal competition from other states and the much higher cost of transporting paddy from paddy-growing districts of West Bengal relatively to that of the mofussil mills. The Association claimed that the cost of transport in the case of Calcutta Mills amounted, on an average, to nearly one third of the value of the raw material processed by them.⁴⁴ What was once the hub centre of the 'rice milling industry of the province thus turned into the most problematic zone. Consequently, the number of mills steadily declined in Calcutta and the areas around it.⁴⁵

The Partition had created dislocations of other kinds as well. The rice milling industry of Dinajpur offers a case in point. The industry, though of a late origin in this district, had made rapid progress, within a short period. In 1944-45 the district, with 9.11% of the total mills of Bengal,⁴⁶ had emerged as an important centre of the industry. Dinajpur mills had been mainly fed by the paddy coming from the districts of Bogura and Rangpur in addition to the local supplies of the district. The rice produced by these mills was regularly sent to the markets of Bihar, and N.W. provinces, as stated earlier.

The Partition nearly blocked the supply routes of both the raw materials and the finished products. Out of the 43 rice mills of the district 24 now belonged to East Pakistan. While these mills were deprived of their markets in upper India, the remaining 17 mills, which now belonged to the newly constructed Dinajpur district, lost their traditional supply base in the districts of Bogura and Rangpur.

The Partition had also dislocated their lines of communications. For instance, ten out of the seventeen mills of West Dinajpur district were located at Hilli close to the border of Pakistan. Since the railway station at Hilli now belonged to East Pakistan, the minimum distance between these mills and the nearest railway station at Kaliaganj was seventy miles and the distance in the case of seven other mills was about 25 to 40 miles. Similarly, they had to import

paddy from distant places.⁴⁷ Either way the total cost on account of transport greatly reduced the competitive cost advantage of the Dinajpur mills, which they had earlier enjoyed because of their locational advantage and abundant supplies of raw materials. In the post-partition period, therefore, even the mills of West Dinajpur could no longer supply their products to their traditional markets in upper India.

I : 2 Growth of the industry : An explanation

2 : 1 Export trade in rice

The rice milling industry of Bengal owes its early growth to the compulsions of Calcutta's expanding export trade in rice. It was the growth of this export trade that had necessitated a complete reorganization of the existing pattern of the inland trade in rice with Calcutta soon emerging as the entrepot exercising its immense centripetal pull, on the flow of the marketable surplus of paddy from all parts of the province and even from the outside areas adjacent to it. Thus, according to an estimate of 1876 - 77, the rice trade with Calcutta was larger than that with the rest of the province.⁴⁸

How much of this rice was consumed in Calcutta is a relevant question. In 1876 - 77, Calcutta's total export trade of rice (188 lakh maunds) was 4.58 times greater than what it had actually consumed (41 lakhs),⁴⁹ and the sea borne exports had amounted to 90.25% of the total rice trade of Calcutta in 1882 - 83.⁵⁰ The export of rice from Calcutta had increased by 196% between 1873 and 1878,⁵¹ and it continued to grow over a long period time.⁵² Bulk of these exports went to Ceylon, Singapore, particularly to Mauritius, to feed the population there, originally indentured labourers for the local plantation industries.⁵³ The Additional Collector of 24-Parganas reported to the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Bengal, in 1926 that a large quantity of husked rice was exported from the district to foreign ports like Havana, Cuba, New York, Montenegro and Liverpool. The major portion of this, i.e., about two-thirds of the foreign exports, went to Havana and Hamburg.⁵⁴ Rice was also exported from Calcutta to the ports of Bombay and Madras to overcome the vagaries of season.⁵⁵ The

nature of this export trade was completely different from the export of high-quality rice from Bengal to the advanced markets of U.K.—Austria, Europe, America and Japan,⁵⁶ which had been determined by sheer, laws of the market. The export of common rice to the plantation areas was influenced among other things by the larger colonial interest of the United Kingdoms. It was due to this imperial exigency that the Government had always encouraged the export of rice often violating its declared policy⁵⁷ and ignoring a critical press.⁵⁸

The emergence of rice mills in Calcutta was necessitated by this export trade of rice — a point which explains a similar development of the rice milling industry in the port cities of Burma involved in the export of rice, such as Rangoon, Akyab and Bassein in an earlier period.⁵⁹ The nature of this export trade necessitated the supply of a large volume of rice within a short period of time and mostly on a short notice. This always created an unusual pressure on the traditional organisation of trade and on the industry of rice-husking, sending its ripples through the whole chain of connections of bigger rice traders, suppliers of Calcutta, *mofussil goladars* and *aratdars* down to the professional huskers of the village, working under the *bani-mahajans*.

Bani-walabs were a class of intermediary traders, who served as a link between professional huskers, and *Kisti-walah* *Beparis* or agents collecting husked rice from *bani-walabs* for bigger merchants like the *mahajan / aratdar*. The *bani-walah* purchased either directly from cultivators or through *paikars* at the village hats. *Bani-walabs* got the paddy husked by the professional husker called the *Kutni*.

Thus the need of an improved, quicker and more dependable method of rice husking was long felt. Its development in Calcutta, so that the dependence of the export trade on *bani-mahajans* and village huskers could be dispensed with, was delayed till such technology was available in the town. With the gradual improvement in the organisation of Calcutta's business world, and the availability of improved technology in the early years of the twentieth century⁶⁰ rice mills began to grow in Calcutta. The success of the jute industry in Calcutta encouraged the big rice traders to establish a similar processing industry in regard to rice. The early beginning and the

concentration of the rice mills in and around the rice - exporting marts of Calcutta⁶¹ suggests the strong export trade link of the industry. Thus the number of rice mills in Bengal had increased from 40 to 286 or by 615 per cent between 1918 and 1928,⁶² a period when the export of rice from Calcutta to foreign countries increased by 573 per cent.⁶³ The industry had lost its early momentum of growth with the slackening of the export trade in rice in the early 1930's.⁶⁴

2 : 2 Urbanization

The phenomenal development of the rice milling industry, particularly its subsequent pattern of distribution, had been also influenced by increasing urbanization and the steady growth of an urban demand for milled rice. The population of Calcutta, for example, increased by about 11·4 per cent between 1881 and 1891 and in the following decade by a further 24·2 per cent. That of the Serampore sub-division in Hooghly grew by 40 per cent between 1881 and 1891 adding a further 24 per cent by 1901. In the industrial belt of Howrah there was a spectacular growth of nearly 88 per cent in the period between 1872 and 1901. A large grain supply was thus necessary to feed this growing urban and semi-urban population.⁶⁵ It appears from Table II below that in the early years of our period rice mills had the largest concentration in the districts of 24-Parganas, Burdwan and Midnapore. The Midnapore mills primarily fed the urban population of Calcutta.

The strong prejudice against the use of machin-husked rice even in the late-nineteenth century,⁶⁶ was relatively weaker in Calcutta and in other urban centres or in the industrial areas of Asansol-Raniganj in Burdwan district. It weakened further with the increasing availability and the comparative cheapness of the milled rice. Thus in the early 1920's *Dhenki*-husked rice was yielding place to milled rice even in the markets of a mofussil town like Burdwan.⁶⁷ Milled rice was specially in demand among the industrial labourers.⁶⁸ In 1926 the Bankura mills were reported to have been sending milled rice regularly to the industrial towns of Kharagpur and Tatanagar.⁶⁹ The colliery areas also emerged as new centres of demand for the cheaper varieties of milled

rice. Thus Asansol and Raniganj consumed a considerable amount of coarse rice produced by rice mills of Burdwan and Bankura.⁷⁰

2 : 3 Other factors

In his study of the Birbhum rice industry Hasim Amir Ali related the growth of the rice milling industry of Bolpur to the high agricultural prices of the time.⁷¹ Bolpur had altogether nineteen rice mills in 1951,⁷² of which seventeen were established between 1915 and 1928.⁷³ It is, however, difficult to state, with any degree of statistical accuracy, the exact relationship between the rising prices of rice and the growth of the rice milling industry in Bengal. However, it is interesting to note that the rice milling industry had its maximum growth during the period of rising prices of rice. Thus the number of registered rice mills in Bengal had increased from 35 in 1916 to 286 in 1928,⁷⁴ when the average annual price of common rice in Bengal moved upwards from Rs. 5 and 7 annas per maund in 1916, to Rs. 7 and 6 annas in 1919, rising as high as Rs. 7 and 8 annas per maund in 1928 with minor undulations in the intermittent years.⁷⁵ Therefore, the number of rice mills in Bengal had increased by more than eight times between 1916 and 1928, a period when the common rice of Bengal had only increased by 38%.

The extension of railways increased the movement of the surplus grain to Calcutta, particularly from the western districts of Burdwan, Birbhum and Bankura as also from the adjacent districts of Orissa. The railways also facilitated the export of milled rice from these districts to other inland markets outside Bengal. With the railways also came the cheaper supplies of coal to fuel boilers of rice mills. The extension of railways and the availability of a large surplus stock of paddy thus accounted for a similar concentration of rice mills in the western districts of Bengal. Availability of power and presence of cheap labour were other favourable circumstances. The growth of a new spirit of enterprise in Bengal in the early twentieth century, the large supply of raw materials for this raw material-oriented industry, and the small amount of capital requirement were other encouraging factors.⁷⁶

I : 3 Distribution

3 : 1 Pattern

Unlike most of the Bengal industries which were concentrated in and around Calcutta, and the colliary areas,⁷⁷ the rice-mill industry was characterized by dispersion over a wide geographical area.⁷⁸ Thus Ashok Mitra had noted in 1951 : "The most common industries employing power-distributed in almost all districts of the state are rice mills."⁷⁹

As noted above, the rice milling industry, coming up first in Calcutta, gradually spread to the districts. The emergence of large-scale and medium-sized rice mills in the rice surplus districts of Bengal started sometime in the second decade of the twentieth century.⁸⁰ For instance, Bolpur, which had eighteen rice mills in 1928, had its first only in 1913,⁸¹ or Bankura, where rice-milling was the most important non-conventional industry almost till the end of our period, had only two such mills in 1921,⁸² and as many as nineteen in 1926.⁸³ Similarly, the first full-fledged rice mill was established in Rajsahi in 1915.⁸⁴ It was only in the districts of Midnapore and Burdwan that the industry had an early start. Thus in 1921, Burdwan had the largest number of rice mills (twenty-two), next only to the district of 24-Parganas, followed by Midnapore, which had ten.⁸⁵ The location of a large number of rice mills in and around Calcutta was mainly governed by the market factor and the accessibility of this area to country boats from the typical paddy growing areas of the Ganges delta,⁸⁶ while proximity to the great rice markets of Calcutta and Howrah, together with the large supply of the raw materials, had encouraged an early growth of the industry in the districts like Burdwan and Midnapore.

The gradual spread of the rice mill in the districts brought about a significant change in the distribution pattern of the industry. And this in its turn had resulted in a similar reallocation of the available surplus rice, that was usually brought to the market and milled. A study of the changing pattern of distribution of rice mills in various parts of the state would, therefore, be relevant to our understanding of the changing course and structure of paddy-rice trade, the interaction of the metropolitan and district mills, and their impact on the

traditional industry of rice-husking and the rice economy at large. Table-II below indicates the changing pattern of distribution of rice mills in the districts at four different points of time.

Table - II

*The Changing distribution pattern of the rice mills in Bengal :
1920-1950*

District	1920-1921		1934-1935		1944-1945		1949-1950	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
24 - Parganas	61	44.52	142	35.23	105	25.92	96	27.42
Howrah	N.A.	N.A.	12	2.97	23	5.11	12	3.42
Burdwan	22	16.05	56	13.89	59	13.11	48	13.71
Midnapore	10	7.29	42	10.42	65	14.44	59	16.85
Birbhum	5	3.64	53	13.15	54	12	57	16.28
Bankura	2	1.45	16	3.97	22	4.88	21	6
Hooghly	N.A.	N.A.	32	7.94	28	6.22	23	6.57
Dinajpur/West	N.A.	N.A.	30	7.44	41	9.11	17	4.85
Jalpaiguri	N.A.	N.A.	1	0.24	4	0.88	8	2.28
Bogura	3	2.18	2	0.49	2	0.44	N.A.	N.A.
Bakarganj	1	0.72	4	0.99	4	0.88	N.A.	N.A.
Rajsahi	1	0.72	2	0.49	2	0.44	N.A.	N.A.
Murshidabad	1	0.72	1	0.24	N.A.	N.A.	1	0.28
Others	31	22.62	10	2.48	41	9.11	8	2.28
Total No. of mills in Bengal	137		403		450		350	

Explanatory Note :

A : Number of the rice mills in the relevant district.

B : Relative share in the total rice mills in Bengal during the period as shown. (Stated in Percentage).

Source :

- (i) *Report of the Census of India, 1921, Vol - V, Part - 1.* Pp. 408 - 409 ; (ii) *The Report on the Marketing of rice in Bengal.* Senior Marketing Officer, Bengal. Appendix - XII ; As reproduced in the *Report of the Bengal Paddy and Rice, Enquiry*

Committee 1938, P. 14 ; (iii) Report of the Bengal Industrial Survey Committee 1948, Pp. 22, 199 - 200 ; (iv) Report on the Family Budget Enquiry into the living conditions of the Rice Mill Workers in West Bengal : 1949 - 50, P. 1.

3 : 2 An Explanation :

Table-II suggests that rice mills were not evenly distributed in the districts. Being mainly a raw material-oriented industry⁸⁷ its concentration in some parts of the province actually indicates the availability of surplus rice in the husk. Thus Burdwan having a fairly large surplus (53·52% of the total rice production of the district) had 59 rice mills or 13·11% of the total number of mills in Bengal in 1944-45. Midnapore, which had a surplus of 8·3%, had a still greater share (14·44%) of the total rice mills. Similarly, Birbhum and Bankura, having surplus production of 3·29% and 19·13%⁸⁸ had 54 and 22 rice mills respectively. Thus rice mills were established primarily in those districts, which had a fairly large surplus of paddy.⁸⁹

But that was not all. The district of the Twenty-four Parganas excluding Calcutta, was a surplus district⁹⁰ and including the city it had a deficit of 158·39% of its total production of rice, according to an estimate in 1939. However, that could not prevent the localization of the largest number of rice mills in the district, most of which were situated in the vicinity of Calcutta. For instance, Hooghly could produce only 7·18% of its total consumption requirement of rice, according to an estimate of 1939, but the district had a larger number of rice mills than any of the surplus areas of Bankura, Dinajpur and Bakarganj in 1934-35. So also was the deficient district of Howrah, which had as many as 23 rice mills despite a deficit production of nearly 66%.⁹¹

In fact, the large concentration of rice mills in the districts of the Twenty-Four Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly, despite a deficiency in the local production of the crop, was primarily due to the special advantages enjoyed by these areas, such as the relatively easy import of paddy from their wide hinterlands as also from the neighbouring states of Bihar and Orissa, proximity to the largest market of the province and the greater facility for transport to different

markets, both inland and overseas. That was why Midnapore, having a much smaller surplus production than Burdwan, had a larger number of mills than the latter; and Bakarganj, a surplus district, had only four rice mills, which came into existence mainly in the 1930's.⁹²

Some districts, again, had no rice mill at all. Thus Nadia which, like Midnapore, enjoyed all the advantages of proximity to the Calcutta market, easier river and rail links and other infrastructural facilities, failed to attract a single rice mill, presumably because it did not produce enough rice for local consumption. The undivided district of Nadia having 92.4% of its total ploughed area under rice⁹³ could on an average, produce only 67% of its total annual requirement of paddy.⁹⁴ It was also because the district; unlike Hooghly, could not bank upon large supplies of paddy from adjacent districts, that regularly flowed through its rivers to the markets of Chandernagore, Howrah and Calcutta,⁹⁵ obviously for reasons of relative disadvantage. The question of the relative disadvantage of Nadia in regard to establishment of rice-mills becomes all the more apparent when we consider the prosperity and the early growth of the non-conventional sugar industry in the district. For instance, in 1901 Nadia had as many as five sugar factories out of the total of eight all over Bengal. In four of these five factories the number of regular employees per day varied from 100 to 125 on an average.⁹⁶ The industry suffered reverses in the following decades. In 1921 the district had nine sugar factories, relatively of smaller size, with only 149 regular employees in total.⁹⁷ Later the district had some largescale sugar mills such as that of Carew Co. Limited, owned by Lyall Marshall & Co., which was one of the biggest mills of its kind in India.⁹⁸

Khulna offers an interesting example of a district having a surplus rice production but having no rice mill at all.⁹⁹

The non-existence of any rice mill in the district is due to its geographical advantage of ferrying its paddy to Calcutta cheaply along its innumerable rivers and their creeks.¹⁰⁰ It enjoyed the added advantage of carrying paddy in jute ferries and getting milled rice, often the cheaper varieties, from Calcutta as the return cargo.¹⁰¹

Table-II also indicates that the rice milling was predominantly a Western Bengal industry. Thus the western Bengal districts of the 24-Parganas, Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, Midnapore, Howrah and Hooghly accounted for nearly 87·59% of the total rice mills in Bengal in 1934-35, 79·11% in 1944-45 and 90·28% in 1949-50, while the districts of northern and eastern Bengal except Dinajpur had only a sprinkling of mills. Thus Mymensingh, Bakarganj, Rajshahi, Malda, Bogura, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri together had only 3·47% of the total rice mills of Bengal in 1934-35,¹⁰² despite the fact that some of them were surplus areas.¹⁰³ The large scale growth of the rice milling industry in the districts of Western Bengal was due partly to the easier and better railway links¹⁰⁴ as also to the cheaper supply of coal from the adjacent coal mining areas of Bengal — the absence of which hindered a similar development of the industry in the rice surplus districts of northern and eastern Bengal. The negligible growth of the industry in the latter region was also attributable to the increasing importance of the cultivation of jute in this region, (reflected in the mushroom growth of the new industry of jute pressing, ¹⁰⁵) and more particularly to the geographical advantage of a cheap river traffic with Calcutta. Thus carriage by boats, to and from these districts, remained the cheapest method of transport. For instance, the average boat freight from Barisal to Calcutta was only one anna per maund as against four annas by the steamer.¹⁰⁶

3 : 3 Later Changes :

Table-II also indicates a progressive change in the distribution pattern of the rice milling industry in the different districts of Bengal. Thus the Twenty-Four Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and Burdwan suffered a decline in their respective shares of rice mills in the total number of mills in Bengal between 1920 and 1950. The loss of the Twenty-Four Parganas was much more impressive than that of either Howrah or Burdwan. The district had a share as high as 44·52% in 1920-21, which fell to 35·23% in 1934-35, dwindling further to 25·92% in 1944-1945 and 27·42% in 1949-1950. The share of the Burdwan district also had a declining trend during the period under review. The number of the mills in Burdwan had increased substantially between 1920 and 1935, increased only

marginally during the period between 1935 and 1940 and then declined in the late 1940's. The declining share of the leading rice milling districts in the total number of mills in Bengal suggests that between 1920 and 1950 the industry had a considerable growth in other areas of Bengal, particularly in Midnapore, Birbhum, Bankura and Dinajpur. For instance, in Midnapore the number of the rice mills increased from 10 in 1920-21 to 42 in 1934-35 and 65 in 1944-1945, since the number of mills began to decrease. The industry had a more spectacular growth in the district of Birbhum, where the number of mills had increased from 5 in 1920-21 to 53 in 1934-35 and 57 in 1949-50. The districts of Bankura and Dinajpur also had a very high rate of growth during the period under study.

The progressive decline in the number of mills in the districts of the Twenty-Four Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly suggests a corresponding fall in the total volume of paddy supplies to these districts, as also a dislocation in the distribution pattern of the surplus paddy to the different milling centres. With the growth of the rice mills in the mofussil areas the usual movement of paddy from the surplus areas to the large markets of Calcutta and Howrah had been replaced by the flow of milled rice from those areas to the metropolitan markets,¹⁰⁷ thus compelling rice mill giants of Calcutta and its adjacent areas to seek the supplies of raw materials from other sources. Therefore, in the 1930's the mills of Calcutta and Howrah started importing paddy almost regularly from Akyab and other ports of Burma. Imports varied from 40,000 to 60,000 tons per year.¹⁰⁸ The mills of Howrah and Hooghly had suffered more in this regard than the Calcutta mills, which till 1947 had almost an uninterrupted supply of paddy from the eastern districts of Khulna, Jessore and such other areas as Bakarganj.

The partition of Bengal in 1947 brought about a considerable dislocation in the supplies of raw materials as well as in the trade in finished products. With the cessation of supplies from Burma and the eastern districts of undivided Bengal the mills of Calcutta and Howrah faced an acute crisis of paddy supplies, resulting in hazardous competition and complications in the wholesale rice trade market of Bengal in the 1950's.¹⁰⁹ This in its turn affected the existing pattern of interaction of the metropolitan and the mofussil

mills, particularly those placed in the surplus areas. The expanding network of new roads, railways and the emergence of new centres of urban demand had solved some of their marketing problems faced by the mofussil mills in the earlier years. Towards the end of our period, therefore, rice mills located in the surplus districts came to have a considerable edge over the mills of Calcutta and Howrah.¹¹⁰ All these had a significant impact not only on the subsequent development of the industry under review, but also on the structure and organisation of trading and marketing of rice in Bengal, which is analysed in the following section.

I : 4 Features :

But before that, a brief study of some of the salient features of the organization of the industry would help us understand the overall impact of the rice milling industry on the rural economy of Bengal.

4 : 1 Seasonality of rice milling :

Rice milling was mainly a seasonal industry.¹¹¹ The operational period of a rice mill was usually determined by the availability of an abundant supply of paddy in the market and of cheap casual labour. Most of the rice mills thus worked for six to eight months a year, usually from the harvesting month of *Kartik* (October-November) till the month of *Batsakh* (April-May), when the flow of paddy in the market almost ceased.¹¹² The running of a mill beyond this usual period was constrained by the higher expenditure on account of the additional storage of raw materials as also by the difficulty of ensuring the supply of cheap labour during the sowing seasons.¹¹³ Thus in 1933-34, Bolpur had seventeen rice mills of which only four worked throughout the year.

Mills working throughout the year usually suffered from under-utilization of their productive capacities during the off-season. For instance, three of the four mills operating throughout the year had milled only 90,000 maunds of paddy each, while a fifth Bolpur mill had achieved that production target in just six months and another in nine months.¹¹⁴ One reason for this under-utilization was the

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difficulty of sun-drying the boiled paddy during the rainy months, given the level of technology of the rice mill. Complete mechanization of all the processes of rice milling, as stated above, had been introduced into the industry only towards the end of our period.

4 : 2 Rice Milling : A Medium sized Industry :

In terms of the volume of employment it created rice milling essentially remained a medium - sized industry, throughout the period under study. Most of the rice mills in Bengal, producing parboiled rice, had a labour requirement of 50 to 60 workers per day on an average.¹¹⁵ The number of the bigger rice mills employing more than one hundred workers constituted only a small proportion of the total number of mills in Bengal. In 1921 Bengal had 137 rice mills, of which only two had more than hundred employees.¹¹⁶ The proportion of such mills of the increasing number of rice mills in Bengal did not change much over the years. A study of the rice mills of West Bengal thus revealed, that out of the 162 sample units as on 1. 4. 1949 only 15 or 9.25% mills had more than one hundred employees, 50.61% or 82 rice mills had 50 to 100 workers in their employment and the rest had a workforce below fifty.¹¹⁷

4 : 3. Temporary nature of Employment in Rice Milling :

Since the labour required was mostly unskilled the scope of specialization in the rice milling industry was severely limited. In most of the mills of an average size there was a good deal of combination of works. In smaller mills the *tindal*, also served as the *hullerman*. The *fireman* himself prepared the husk for the boiler instead of the *huskman* having been maintained separately for the purpose. Similarly the same group of coolies performed the functions of the *huller coolies* and the *chatal coolies*.¹¹⁸ A study of the rice mills in the 1960's shows that only 32 per cent of the total workforce engaged in the bigger rice mills of Vidarbha in Maharashtra were skilled workers.¹¹⁹ The scope and the real extent of such specialization in the rice mills of Bengal during the period under study was still narrower, partly because of the production of

parboiled rice and partly due to the level of technology available at that time. The production of parboiled rice by the Bengal mills required sun-drying of the boiled paddy, which was a labour-intensive device.

The permanent workers in the rice milling industry formed only a small segment of the total workforce, the large majority of which was usually employed purely on a temporary basis.¹²⁰ A considerable part of the casual labour, particularly male labour, was migrant labour from other states.¹²¹ Women labour in the rice mills had an important role, more particularly in Bengal, where most of the mills produced parboiled rice. Generally in such mills the important work of stretching out the boiled paddy on the *chatahs* (open floors) and sun-drying was done by female labour. The exact composition of the workers in the rice mills of Bengal is not known. For instance, female labour in the rice mills of the Vidharva region in Maharashtra at a later period constituted 30% of the total workforce engaged in the industry.¹²² Due to production of parboiled rice the Bengal mills had naturally a larger requirement of women workers. Therefore, the size of female labour engaged in the Bengal mills during the period under study must have been greater than that in the Maharashtra mills. The casual labourers in rice mills mostly worked under contractors, usually called *sardars* and *sardarnis*. The contractors usually made agreements with the mill owners and acted as the recruiting and disbursing agents on their behalf. In most cases, the *sardar* was a migrant contractor coming to the milling centre during the rice milling season with a band of migrant workers. His female counterpart, on the other hand, was a local woman, generally living in a neighbouring village, and visited the mill with the village women which she was supposed to bring along. While the job of the *sardarni* was mostly assured for the entire working season, that of her fellow workers was determined usually on the previous day according to the daily work load. The system of payment as also the rates of wages differed from mill to mill. Generally, payment was made to the *sardar/sardarni* at the end of the week on completion of a stipulated amount of work. The contractor at the outset deducted his/her commission at the rate of one anna to two annas per rupee and then equally divided the balance amongst the actual workers keeping one share for himself/herself.

Sometimes the sardar/sardarni also worked with his/her workers and took one portion as a legitimate share.¹²³

4 : 4 Rice Milling : An Indigenous Enterprise :

Rice milling was predominantly an indigenous enterprise. Unlike most other important industries of the province, European participation in this field was almost non-existent.¹²⁴ In 1921 Bengal had altogether 137 rice mills of which only one was under European management.¹²⁵ The Europeans had relatively a greater participation in the management of rice and flour mills in Bombay.¹²⁶ In the beginning, Bengali entrepreneurs had the largest share of the rice mills, followed by up-country Marwari merchants. From the list of the rice mills in Bengal, compiled in 1924-25 by Sri Santosh Nath Seth, a rice trading mahajan of Chandannagore in Hooghly, it appears that the Bengali traders not only possessed most of the mills in the Belgachhia-Chetla-Alipore-Tolleygunj-Behala region, then considered as the hub centre of the rice milling industry, but also formed the majority among the rice mill owners in the districts.¹²⁷ Lack of data makes it difficult for us to explain the nature and composition of this entrepreneurship. From stray references in heterogeneous sources we gather that most of the rice mills in the Calcutta-Howrah region and in the towns of the rice-surplus districts had been originally founded either by the large-scale rice-trading merchants like the *Goladars*, *Aratdars*, *Mahajans* or by other persons directly connected with such trade.¹²⁸ The profitability of the industry gradually encouraged other moneyed persons to attempt similar ventures in various parts of the province. Thus we see a number of zamindars and zamindar - merchant combines among the rice mill owners in the districts.¹²⁹ The owners of the district mills included a pleader and president of the union board, who started a rice mill in Bolpur.¹³⁰ Unlike the other small and medium-sized industries, such as hosiery, chemicals, small-engineering, tannery and match industries, rice mills could not much attract middle class enterprise, though it was rewarding and was not a capital-intensive industry.

The pattern of ownership of rice mills in Bengal changed significantly in the later decades. Already in the mid-1920's the Marwari

and the Nakhoda merchants had established a considerable number of mills in the districts.¹⁸¹ A result was the gradual emergence of a powerful class of Marwari traders controlling large rice mills. This trend was quite evident in the late 1930's. A comparison of the list of the mills, provided by the Chief Inspector of Factories in Bengal in 1935 with that by the Chandannagore merchant, prepared a decade earlier, shows that the number of the Marwari mills all over Bengal had increased. For instance, the number of such mills in the Twenty-Four Parganas increased from 14 in 1924-25 to 26 in 1935 and in Burdwan from two to twelve during the same period.¹⁸² Rice milling had attracted the Birlas, who had two such mills in the Belgachia area of Calcutta in 1924.¹⁸³ However, the 1935 list of rice mills clearly shows that the industry was still overwhelmingly a field of the Bengali enterprise.¹⁸⁴ However, the Bengali traders and other entrepreneurs could not maintain their lead for long. The key control of the business soon passed to the Marwari traders and from the late 1940's the medium-sized mills, particularly in the districts, underwent a change in ownership leading to the emergence of big rice-milling interests in the state. This would be dealt with in the following section.

The two lists mentioned above also suggest that ownership of mills actually cut across caste lines. Thus a good number of rice mills belonged to *Brahmins* and the *Kayasthas*.¹⁸⁵ The heterogeneous caste composition of the Bengali rice mill owners had its geographical variation. For instance, the *Sadhukhans*, who constituted the largest single caste bloc among the Bengali rice millers, were mostly concentrated in the district of the 24-Parganas. They owned nearly 15% of the total mills of that district.¹⁸⁶ The traditional enterprising caste group of Bengal like the *Sahas*, *Telis*, *Kundus* and the *Sadgops* also had a considerable share of the rice mill ownership.¹⁸⁷ The *Sadgops* and the *Dalals* were most prominent among the Bolpur millers and generally constituted the leading enterprising caste group in the Birbhum district.¹⁸⁸ A number of mills also belonged to Bengali Muslim traders.¹⁸⁹ With the concentration of ownership in fewer hands in the following period the caste composition of millers also changed — a point which it would be difficult to analyse for want of relevant evidence.

II. Rice Mill and the Question of Rural Unemployment.

The new industry had threatened the professional position of the hand-pounders as a group, most of whom were unskilled women, destitute, depressed and above all debarred by social customs to do outdoor work.

Daniel and Alice Thorner, while studying the extent of de-industrialization in India during 1881 to 1931 period, concluded: "Whatever new employment was created by the introduction of textile mills, rice dehushing plants and other modern industrial establishments may have been roughly offset by an equivalent falling off in handicrafts".¹⁴⁰ So far as the rice dehushing plants were concerned the present study reveals that, in Bengal at least, the rate of creation of employment in the rice milling industry was much lower than the rate of declining employment in the traditional branch of the industry.

II. 1: Rice-Pounders : the Census data.

The census occupational data suggest that the falling off in the number of rice pounders, starting sometime in the late nineteenth century, became increasingly pronounced in the following decades. In 1901 Bengal had altogether 4,31,000 rice pounders.¹⁴¹ The number had come down to 2,83,913 in 1921, including the flour grinders,¹⁴² a group growing since the early years of the present century.¹⁴³ Most of this decline, therefore, took place in the realm of hand-pounding of rice. The 1921 Census thus reported: "The number supported by food industries appears considerably less than in 1911 or 1901, owing to a great decrease among those returned as rice pounders and huskers"¹⁴⁴

The Census data about the decline in the number of rice huskers related only to professional huskers, who used to handpound paddy for others in return for cash, but most often, for a certain share of the rice actually pounded and the whole of the bran.¹⁴⁵ The quantum of rice, hand-pounded by this group of professional huskers, however, formed only a small part of the total amount of rice processed in the traditional way. Bulk of this rice was produced by the womenfolk of the peasant household, all over rural Bengal. There

is no evidence, statistical or otherwise, to quantify the loss of this traditional work and the consequent fall of the income of the peasant family. As we would see later, with the coming of rice mills and, more particularly, the penetration of hullers in the villages, the traditional job of *dhenki*-husking of rice, even for consumption in the peasant house-hold, began to decline. The loss suffered by the peasant family and also by the professional huskers, due to the shifting of this important processing work from village homes to mechanized mill houses, was considerable. In 1876-77 a rupee's worth of paddy was calculated to yield rice worth a rupee and six annas and an industrious peasant family could get this additional six annas without much difficulty.¹⁴⁶

The impact of rice mills on the traditional rural economy was, therefore, far more significant than the mere decline in the number of the professional huskers as reflected in the census data. In fact, the decennial censuses, because of variations in their methods of enumeration, can not even explain the real nature of the falling-off.

II : 2. Traditional organization of the hand-pounding industry.

Rice mills, together with hullers, had disorganized and dislocated the existing mode of rice manufacture. The traditional hand-pounding industry had been widespread even in the early years of the twentieth century, meeting the requirements of a predominantly rice-based subsistence agriculture and also the growing demands of the urban population. It had also supplied the demands of an expanding export trade in rice. Calcutta, during this time, had an internal consumption of 41 lakh maunds of rice and had an additional requirement of 188 lakh maunds for its export trade. In 1876-77, therefore, Calcutta had imported by internal traffic routes nearly two crore maunds of rice from different districts.¹⁴⁷ Since the new techniques of rice milling had not yet been introduced in these districts it would be reasonable to argue that all this rice was processed in the conventional way. Table - III below would suggest that during the period 1876 - 1883 Calcutta's paddy import by internal traffic routes, though on the rise, was far smaller than the import of rice from the districts. Thus the total amount of paddy

imported into Calcutta from the internal sources constituted only 4·48% of the city's total intake of paddy and rice from similar sources during the year 1876 - 1877. Part of this paddy was re-exported from Calcutta and the rest was manufactured in the city, partly by organized huskers and partly by newly introduced hullers.

Table - III

Import of Paddy and Rice into Calcutta by Internal Traffic Routes and export of the same from the City : 1876-83.

Year	Rice (Stated in Maunds)	Paddy	Percentage of column 3 to 2	Export of rice from Calcutta	Export of Paddy from Calcutta
1	2	3	4	5	6
1876-77	1,79,39,354	8,41,700	4·69	1·88	3·28
1877-78	2,43,21,289	13,61,547	5·59	2·19	3·28
1878-79	1,39,44,299	12,61,866	9·04	1·26	N. A.
1879-80	1,08,84,703	15,06,660	13·84	0·91	0·2
1880-81	1,45,21,150	16,13,425	11·11	1·35	0·31
1881-82	1,66,06,315	19,72,743	11·87	1·6	1·72
1882-83	1,67,62,927	18,90,873	11·28	1·69	1·37

Source : *Report on the Internal Trade of Bengal, for the years 1876 - 77 to 1882 - 83.*

Thus even in the late nineteenth century Calcutta was almost wholly dependent on hand-pounding industry, both for her internal consumption and her export trade. The large supply of hand-pounded rice came mainly from the districts of Midnapore, Bankura, Birbhum, Jessore, Khulna, Dinajpore and Bakarganj.¹⁴⁸ In fact, the use of hand-pounded rice was so pervasive in Calcutta that in 1901 a Ramkrishnapur *aratdar* regretted that he could not make much out of his newly purchased huller machine for want of customers, which had ultimately forced him to start paddy dealing on his own.¹⁴⁹

The strong export trade link had encouraged the growth of the traditional hand-pounding industry in some parts of the province, notably in the districts adjacent to the leading centres of rice export. The district of Hooghly, with a number of rice ports like Serampore, Chandannagore and Chinsurah, and easier river links with Calcutta, was a case in point.

2 : 1 Pattern of this organization.

A highly organized hand-pounding industry existed over large tracts of Howrah and Hooghly districts even in 1903. The industry served as a feeder to the great rice mart of Ramkristopur in Howrah. A class of intermediaries, called *baniwalahs*, purchased paddy on credit from Magrahat and other places and carried the paddy to their own villages or to other centres to get them husked by professional huskers, called *kutnis*. They did not carry the processed rice to the ultimate market but sold it to another group of intermediaries, commonly known as *kistiwalahs* or carriers of bulk goods in *kistis*, (large boats). With the sale proceeds the *baniwalahs* used to return to the paddy markets again, settled their outstanding accounts with paikars, village merchants and *aratdars*, bought fresh quantities of paddy and moved to their villages. The *kistiwalahs*, on the other hand, after collecting finished rice from the different husking villages, carried them to the Ramkristopur *aratdars* and also to other centres of trade. Thus it appears that while the *baniwalahs* were located in particular areas, the *kistiwalahs* were itinerant traders moving with their boats often far beyond the limits of their own districts. Both the groups received dadans from the Ramkristopur *aratdars*. Every one in the chain, *kutnis*, *baniwalahs*, *kistiwalahs* and *aratdars*, worked throughout the year and earned good profits.¹⁵⁰

The organized hand-pounding of rice was fairly extensive also in the districts of Maldah and Dinajpur,¹⁵¹ the two nodal points of the export of rice from Bengal to Bihar and to the markets of North - Western India.¹⁵² For instance, in Dinajpur the traditional rice-husking was carried on such an extensive scale that the up-country cooly women had to be imported regularly to supplement the local supply of labour.¹⁵³ Similarly, in Maldah the

industry was widespread, particularly in Nawabaganj and the *diara* tracts employing a large number of women.¹⁵⁴

In some parts of the province the organized hand-pounding of rice for markets continued to exist even in the mid-1920's. Thus a number of the local markets (Chandipur, Nuntay, Shoshaty, Kamalpur, Shyampur, Uluberia etc.) in Howrah in 1926 received large supplies of hand-pounded rice from intermediaries called *Goladars*, who in their turn, used to get rice from professional huskers, procuring the paddy directly from cultivators. A husker's income amounted to six annas per maund of paddy husked, whereas a *Goladar* had a margin of three to four annas per maund of rice sold to his higher merchant.¹⁵⁵

Paddy huskers in the Labhpur area of Birbhum, similarly collected paddy from cultivators but sold the finished rice directly to local consumers. As such their income was generally higher than that of their counterparts in Howrah.¹⁵⁶

2 : 2. Decay :

The industry, by diverting the supplies of surplus paddy to mills and dislocating the existing structure of the rice trade, put an end to the prosperity of this traditional industry. Thus F. W. Strong reported from Dinajpur in 1912 : "Of late years this industry has greatly declined, as now-a-days, rice is most commonly exported un-husked, the husking process being performed elsewhere by machinery at a greatly reduced cost."¹⁵⁷ For instance, the export of rice from Bolpur station amounted to 7,94,524 maunds in 1930, which was larger than the total export of rice from the district of Birbhum in the year 1876-77. In the latter year, the entire quantity of rice exported from the district (7,83,500 maunds) had been cleaned in the village homes as there were no rice mills in Birbhum in those days.¹⁵⁸ The situation had completely changed in 1930, when the small district town of Bolpur alone had eighteen rice mills having an approximate outturn of 8.1 lakh maunds of rice per year.¹⁵⁹ H. A. Ali had observed in 1930 that "... the rice that is exported at present (from Bolpur Station) is all cleaned and husked, not by the housewife in the village home, but by the rice mills in Bolpur."¹⁶⁰

II : 3. Unemployment : An estimate.

3 : 1 Rice Mill and Unemployment

The growth of the rice milling industry in Bengal, therefore, created large scale unemployment among village huskers. In the absence of any statistical evidence regarding the number of persons, thus actually affected, it would be difficult to estimate the actual extent of such unemployment. However, on the basis of certain rough estimates an attempt has been made here to quantify the extent.

For instance, a sheller-type rice mill normally producing 400 maunds of rice per day of eight hours¹⁶¹ as against one maund by a *dhenki* during the same time,¹⁶² put out of use 400 *dhenkis*, and consequently, the labour of 800 women (1 : 2 employment pattern of the *dhenki*)¹⁶³ per day was made redundant. Assuming a 200-days running period,¹⁶⁴ the mill had a total annual outturn of 80,000 maunds of rice, which would have created full time employment (i.e. 8 hours a day.) of 438 women for one full year, if it were not diverted from the traditional to the mill sector.

H. A. Ali's study of Bolpur mills in the 1930's suggests a much lower rate of displacement of huskers per working rice mill. Thus, according to his estimate, 8.1 lakh maunds of rice, produced by the eighteen mills of Bolpur in a year¹⁶⁵ rendered 8,100 *dhenkis* useless and had deprived an equal number of women of their traditional occupation at an annual yield rate of 100 maunds of rice and an 1 : 1 employment ratio of the *dhenki*. The Bolpur mills, therefore, had a displacement rate of $(8,100 \div 18 = 450)$ 450 women on an average per year. Both the annual yield rate and the employment ratio of the *dhenki*, as used by Mr. Ali, were lower than those revealed by later investigations.¹⁶⁶ He also did not precisely state the basis of his estimate. For the sake of uniformity, therefore, we would use the standard yield rate of one maund of rice and employment of two women per *dhenki* per working day. At that rate, the husking of 8.1 lakh maunds of rice, the total annual production of the 18 Bolpur mills, would have required full-time services of 4438 women throughout a year. The average displacement rate of the Bolpur mills is, therefore, $(4438 \div 18 = 246.55 \text{ or } 247)$ 247 women per each operational year

A sample survey of fifty-two rice mills of West Bengal in 1949-50 stated the productive capacity of the mills as varying from 200 to 800 maunds a day.¹⁶⁷ The mills thus had an average milling capacity of 259 maunds per day, or 51,800 maunds in an operational year of 200 days. In the traditional way, therefore, 51,800 maunds of rice would have involved 284 huskers working eight hours a day for one full year at the standard yield rate of one maund of rice and employment of two women per *dhenki* per day.

The above estimates thus show three different rates of displacement of huskers (438, 247 and 284) by rice mills. Assuming the mean of these figures i.e. 323, as the standard displacement rate per rice mill, the total number of persons rendered unemployed by the industry at different points of time could be determined by multiplying the number of the working mills by the average displacement figure of 323. *Table - IV* below would illustrate the point. We

Table - IV
Extent of Unemployment caused by the Rice
Milling Industry in Bengal : 1916 - 1939

Year	No. of the registered rice mills.	No. of persons, employed in the rice mills.	No. of the huskers thrown out of employment by the rice mills.
1	2	3	4
1916	35	1531	11305
1918	40	2039	12920
1920	80	3604	25840
1922	101	4023	32623
1924	132	6185	42636
1926	235	9711	75905
1928	286	10778	92378
1930	315	12225	101745
1932	N. A.	N. A.	N. A.
1934	343	13509	110789
1936	381	16305	123063
1938	411	18635	132753
1939	400	18742	129200

(N. B. : Column : 2 \times 323 = Column : 4)

Source : Columns - 1 to 3 from Adarkar B. P. : *Report on Labour Conditions in the Rice Mills, (Delhi), 1946. Pp. 28 - 29.*

should note that the rates of displacement of huskers in all the three cases above have been estimated with reference to the total requirement of labour in the traditional industry, on the assumption that the same volume of work was done in a year, the working time per day being eight hours. The number of huskers, thrown out of employment by the rice mills, as shown under *Column - 4* of the above Table, would, therefore, actually mean the loss of their full time employment for all the days of the year in reference.

Table - IV shows that the unemployment caused by the rice milling industry was many times greater than the employment created by it. Thus persons employed in rice mills constituted only 13.94% in 1920, 12.01% in 1930, or 14.5% in 1939 of the persons thrown out of employment. In fact, the two concluding columns are not comparable in terms of the units of employment created or employment lost. Because, as regards the nature of employment there was a basic difference between the old and the new branch of the industry. The employment created by the rice mills was predominantly seasonal in nature, continuing for 180 to 240 days a year at the best. A sample survey of the 162 rice mills of West Bengal in 1949-50 revealed that 50.61 per cent of the mills employed 50 to 100 workers per day, out of which only the *tindal*, *fireman*, *hullerman*, *huskman*, *darwans* and a few clerks in the office were taken on a permanent basis.¹⁶⁸ The permanent workers, therefore, represented only 10 to 20 per cent of the workforce engaged in a particular mill. The unit of employment lost as shown under *Column 4* of the Table above was full-time employment for the whole year.

In reality the number of persons rendered unemployed by the rice mills was greater than the figures indicated in the Table above. The Rice Milling Committee of 1955 had concluded that had the paddy processed by the rice mills been entirely hand-pounded, it could create an additional full-time employment of 5.6 lakh persons for 150 days,¹⁶⁹ or a little over 2.3 lakh (2,30,137) persons, for 365 days. In 1955, West Bengal had 403 rice mills in total. Therefore, each rice mill had displaced nearly $(230137 \div 403)$ 571 huskers on an average, which is much higher than 323—the figure used as the standard displacement rate per mill in the *Table IV* above. The Rice Milling Committee had also observed on another occasion :

“For every mill that was introduced about 500 persons were thrown out of hand-pounding work.”¹⁷⁰ All these clearly indicate that the actual gap between the creation of employment in the new branch and the loss of the same in the old, as a result of the growth of the industry under study, was much wider than the one shown here in *Table - IV*.

3 : 2. Rice Huller and Unemployment :

The unemployment caused by the rice milling industry was in reality much more extensive. *Table - IV* does not take into its account the loss of employment due to the penetration of hullers in the villages. A rice huller could produce 40 maunds of rice per day on an average,¹⁷¹ but had a higher running period than a rice mill.¹⁷² Thus a huller in an operational year, say of 300 days, husked 12,000 maunds of rice, which could have created full-time employment for 66 women throughout a year, at the yield rate stated above of one maund of rice and employment of two women per *dhenki* per day of eight hours working period. The scope of employment here, unlike in a rice mill, was negligible, hardly exceeding five persons per huller.¹⁷³ A survey of the small hullers of West Bengal in 1955 thus revealed an 1 : 2 employment pattern per huller.¹⁷⁴

However, the total impact of rice hullers on the employment in the hand-pounding industry was quite considerable in view of the fact that their use rapidly spread to villages of all the districts since the early years of the twentieth century. As stated above, even a remote village of Arambag in Hooghly had as many as ten such units in 1929¹⁷⁵ whereas the number was much greater in some other parts of the province.¹⁷⁶ A study of the small establishments of West Bengal producing rice, with or without power, and employing less than ten persons indicated that in 1952 such units had a total production of 1.02 crore maunds of rice.¹⁷⁷ The same amount of rice would have involved 55,890 women working eight hours a day throughout a year if it was not diverted from the traditional *dhenki* to the hullers. In 1955 the total number of hullers in West Bengal was estimated at 5000 hullers.¹⁷⁸ Assuming that these hullers had an average daily outturn of 40 maunds of rice

and had a 250 days' running year, they would have an annual production of five crore maunds of rice in total; thus displacing a little less than 2.74 lakh (2,73,972) persons from their full-time employment for all the days of the year.

Thus it appears that rice hullers had created more unemployment in rural areas than rice mills. The lower input value of these machines together with their low operational cost, their easy adaptability to other uses typically suited to agricultural economy,¹⁷⁹ and the cheaper cost per unit of rice processed¹⁸⁰ had all combined to encourage the mushroom growth of these units in rural Bengal.¹⁸¹

More significant was the inroad that these machines made into the husking of paddy, which was scarcely marketed and mostly directly consumed by the peasant family. Even long after the coming of the mill, the rice, consumed in millions of the village homes of peasant producers and constituting the greater part of the crop produced, was predominantly hand-pounded by the producers' families themselves. The rice mill only husked the surplus paddy that was brought to the markets for exchange. H. A. Ali's study of the rice-milling industry of lower Birbhum revealed that 18 rice mills of Bolpur had access to only 47.51% of the total paddy produced in their catchment region¹⁸² and the rest was hand-pounded. Coming of rice hullers in the villages and their presence in front of the peasant labourers' homes tempted cultivators to get the paddy for their home consumption milled at the nearest power-driven hullers even though they and their women-folk had time to hand-pound it.¹⁸³ Such a tendency, which killed the peasant's own industry and reduced his meagre income, was spreading rapidly in the later decades with the increasing number of small huller units.

The 1952 survey of the small rice producing units of West Bengal had also revealed that of their total annual production of 1.02 crore maunds of rice only one-fifth was on account of the owners of hullers and the rest provided by others, who brought the paddy to the huller after boiling and drying it.¹⁸⁴ How far this tendency of getting paddy husked at hullers resulted from the alleged laziness among cultivating labourers,¹⁸⁵ is a point of controversy. The

peasant/labourer's laziness or aversion to such hard work as hand-pounding involved¹⁸⁶ was not evident in the usual productive and other activities in which they were engaged. With the advent of rice mills and more particularly small hullers, which tended to reduce the cost per unit of rice processed¹⁸⁷ it seems, the hand-pounding of rice increasingly ceased to be paying in view of the increasing cost of labour involved. In 1951-52 the rate of hulling rice in small machines varied from 12 annas to one rupee per maund¹⁸⁸ as against, Re. 1.5 to Re. 1.75 by the *dhenkis*.¹⁸⁹ The cost of hand-pounding of rice in Bengal had increased by 300 to 540 per cent between the 1930's and the late 1940's "due mainly to the very high rate of wages consequent upon the general rise in price and the cost of living."¹⁹⁰

Thus it was not the peasant/labourer's laziness but the growing and easier availability of the improved technology, and its comparative cheapness, both in terms of time and labour, that had been mainly responsible for the peasant producer's increasing temptation to husk his rice at the nearby huller.

II : 4 Nature of its impact :

The total loss of employment caused by the rice mill and hullers, therefore, did not only completely offset the employment created by the new industry but was actually larger than the employment created by some of the leading industries of the state. For instance, in 1939 Bengal had a total of 59,632 persons employed in its coal mines¹⁹¹ whereas it had lost $(1,29,200 - 18,742 = 1,10,458)$ (See Table - IV) or employment of 1.1 lakh persons in the rural sector because of the rice mills. (This estimate is based on the moderate displacement rate of 323 instead of 571 or 500, as suggested by the Rice Milling Committee of 1955) And if the number of traditional huskers displaced by rice hullers or the indirect unemployment caused by the rice milling industry as a whole is taken into consideration, the aggregate loss of employment appears to have been equivalent, if not greater, to the employment offered by jute mills or by the tea gardens of Bengal.¹⁹²

In 1955, Bengal had 403 rice mills and 5000 hullers, which had displaced a little over 5 lakh $(2.74 + 2.3 \text{ lakh as stated earlier})$

huskers. In 1950 jute mills in Bengal employed only 2·71 lakh persons, which fell to 2·04 lakh persons in 1960.¹⁹⁸

4 : 1. Indirect Unemployment.

The magnitude of the indirect unemployment caused by the rice milling industry was also significant. H. A. Ali had estimated that 18 rice mills of Bolpur put out of use 8000 *dhenkis*, which meant a total loss of Rs. 10,000 to the village carpenter (on account of the loss of *bani* @ Re. 1 per *dhenki* and the cost of the repair) over a period of ten years.¹⁹⁴ At the 1 : 2 employment ratio of the *dhenki*, half of the number of huskers thrown out of employment by rice mills, as shown in the *Column : 4* of *Table IV* above, would indicate the number of the redundant *dhenkis* in the relevant year. In 1939, therefore, 64,600 *dhenkis* were made inoperative. The consequent loss suffered by the village carpenters on account of the *bani* charges for making the *dhenkis* thus amounted to Rs. 64,600 and the loss of the repair works (assuming 25% of the sum as the cost of the repair) to Rs. 16,150. The village carpenters thus had a total loss of over Rs. 80,750 over a period of ten years or Rs. 8,075 per year. Similarly, the village potter also suffered because of the declining demand of the large pots he made for paddy boiling. Only an insignificant part of the loss suffered by the village artisans as a result of the rice milling industry was regained in the form of increased activities of carting the paddy from villages to milling centres.

4 : 2 Drain of rural incomes :

Equally significant was the loss suffered by village huskers. The eighteen rice mills of Bolpur had diverted 8·1 lakh maunds of rice from the *dhenkis*. At the *bani* rate of 8 seers of unhusked rice per one maund of cleaned rice this amounted to a loss of 1·6 lakh ($8\cdot1 \text{ lakh} \times 8 \div 40$) maunds of paddy to the village huskers as the *bani*. A Visva Bharati village study had estimated the average price of paddy at Bolpur in the first three decades of the twentieth century at Rs. 4·5 per maund¹⁹⁵ The total loss of income to village huskers thus amounted to Rs. 7·2 lakh ($1\cdot6 \text{ lakh} \times \text{Rs. } 4\cdot5$) as against the total of Rs. 90,000 spent by the 18 mills of Bolpur on labour payment.¹⁹⁶

The bani rate in the hand-pounding industry widely varied from district to district and not unusually from area to area of a particular district. In general it used to vary according to the quality of the paddy processed and the condition of the work done. It is, therefore, impossible to work out a standard *bani* rate for the entire area under study or for all sorts of husking works, on the basis of which an estimate of the total income lost to village huskers as a result of the diversion of their work to the mill could be made.

It has been stated earlier that 403 rice mills and 5000 hullers in 1955 had displaced a little over five lakh village huskers from their full-time job throughout the year. On the assumption of an average per capita earning of 13 annas per day, as suggested by the Rice Milling Committee of 1955,¹⁹⁷ the total loss suffered by the village huskers thus amounted to $\{(5,00,000 \times 13 \times 365) \div 16 = 14,82,81,250/-\}$ Rs. 14.82 crore per each operational year of mills. And if the cost of bran and the broken rice that the huskers used to receive as part of their wages is taken into account the total annual income lost by the village huskers was thus still greater.

The growth of the rice milling industry thus caused a huge loss of rural income. The 18 rice mills of Bolpur thus drained away (Rs. 7.2 lakh—Rs. 90,000) Rs. 6.3 lakh in 1930 from a catchment area of 372 square miles.¹⁹⁸ The extent of the loss varied according to the degree of mechanization, the nature of concentration of the rice mills in an area as also the yields and the extent of rice cultivation of the locality. With greater integration of the rice market as a consequence of the growth of the rice milling industry, metropolitan mills with much higher inputs of capital and technology began to exercise a greater pull on the local supplies of paddy.

As against this huge drain of rural incomes, rice mills had but very little feed-back to villages. Wages offered by rice mills only marginally affected the neighbouring villages because labour in these mills was largely provided by migrant coolies. A sample survey of the rice mills of West Bengal in 1949-50 indicated that only a small segment of mill workers, called *Chatal* Coolies, required for drying the boiled paddy, were recruited from among the women of the adjoining villages, with a range of one to three miles from the

location of the mill.¹⁹⁹ Even this appears to have been a later practice. For, the women, who used to earn their living by husking, were socially debarred from seeking employment outside their immediate environs or co-working in a mill with the male labourers of unknown origins. In his study of the Bolpur mills in 1930 H. A. Ali stated : "the labour employed in the mills now consists either of men or of Santhal women." He also found large colonies of immigrant Santhal labour in the vicinity of Bolpur.²⁰⁰ Therefore, the supply of local female labour was not readily forthcoming to mills, even when they were willing to employ it. It is only with time that this system of *pardah*²⁰¹ yielded place to more pressing economic needs, making the local women willing to work in mills. The situation, however, did not change very much with regard to the male labour in the rice mill. Even in 1950 "the major portion of these contract workers continued to be recruited from outside the State" through Sardars.²⁰²

Therefore, the local people had a limited share in the wages the rice mills paid to its workforce. The kind of capital inputs required in rice mills also did not generate much employment in the local economy. The balance sheet of a Bolpur mill in 1930 revealed that capital expenses including the building cost constituted only 25.54% of the total annual cost, the largest part of which (91%) was spent on the purchase of raw materials alone.²⁰³ The low level of technological inputs and the petty repairs that the rice milling machineries required from time to time failed to encourage any ancillary growth in the locality.²⁰⁴ The rice mills had not much to offer to the villages, which could compensate the loss of their most important processing industry.

III. Rice Mill and the question of Paddy / Rice Trade.

The growth of the rice milling industry also restructured and refashioned the existing pattern of inland trade of rice, by far the most important and most extensive trade of the province.

III : 1 Trade in hand-pounded rice.

With the decline of the traditional industry of rice-husking the prosperous trade in hand-pounded rice also declined.

The rice mills had adversely affected the long distance movement of such rice. Thus the steady traffic in the *dhenki*-husked rice from the districts to Calcutta, continuing even in the late nineteenth century,²⁰⁵ dwindled to a trickle by the beginning of the twentieth century, when the supply of hand-pounded rice came only from the adjacent districts of Midnapore²⁰⁶ and Hooghly.²⁰⁷ In 1904 the Nakhoda and the Marwari traders were found to have been exporting shiploads of hand-pounded rice from the great rice mart of Ramkristopur in Howrah to Mauritius, Fiji, Ceylon and also to the inland ports like Bombay and Madras.²⁰⁸ The strong export trade link of the traditional hand-pounding industry in the districts adjoining Calcutta has been noted earlier.

1 : 2. Rice Mill's impact on this trade.

The pattern of this inland rice trade had changed completely with the growth of the rice milling industry in Calcutta. Instead of rice, Calcutta now began to import paddy from the districts and husked them at the new rice mills there. Large supplies of paddy came mainly from the surplus districts of eastern Bengal, the northern districts of Dinajpore, Rangpore, Bogra and Jalpaiguri as also from the district of Midnapore, Hooghly, Bankura, Birbhum, and Burdwan.²⁰⁹ With some districts, again, Calcutta soon developed a two way traffic of importing paddy and sending rice in return. The surplus district of Khulna, which earlier used to send boatloads of *dhenki*-husked rice to Calcutta,²¹⁰ now mainly sent paddy,²¹¹ and began to receive milled rice from Calcutta in return boats.²¹² Thus by the end of the 1920's the supply of hand-pounded rice to Calcutta from the districts had nearly ceased.²¹³

The long-distance inland trade in hand-pounded rice in other directions also suffered the same fate. For instance, Orissa, which in the earlier days used to send large supplies of this rice to Bengal through her rivers and coastal trade channels, and subsequently by railways to Calcutta,²¹⁴ now started sending unhusked paddy primarily to the Midnapore mills,²¹⁵ and also partly to Calcutta and other parts of the state.²¹⁶

The undivided district of Dinajpur was perhaps the only exception to this declining trend in the inland trade of hand-pounded rice

in Bengal. Here the traders engaged in exporting *dhenki*-husked rice to Calcutta,²¹⁷ found out, after the collapse of that trade, new centres of demand for their products in the backward markets of Bihar, and the United Provinces, where the demand for rice was always in excess of the local supply.²¹⁸ A nearly similar kind of rearrangement of the existing trade channels also happened in the district of Bogra. With the growth of the rice milling industry in Calcutta the existing flow of such rice from Bogra to Calcutta through the river-borne trade channels of the district, had been diverted to Hilli, presumably for transmission to the remote markets in Bihar and the United Provinces, and also to the semi-urban markets of the districts like Dhupchanchia, Sultanganj, Sonamukhi and Adamdighee.²¹⁹

The hand-pounded rice, however, continued to be bought and sold in the village hats and the district rice markets, till it was further affected by the growth of rice mills in the mofussil areas since the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1924 a whole-sale rice trader of Chandannagore, reporting on the village hats of the district of Burdwan, had noted an altogether new trend of increasing flow of paddy in the hats at the cost of *dhenki*-husked rice.²²⁰ The volume of local transactions in the *dhenki*-husked rice, therefore, gradually declined. A contemporary report on the marketing of rice in Bengal in 1926 thus described this transaction as a direct trade, often between the producer and the retail trader, and sometimes between the husker and the consumer himself in the village hats.²²¹

The traditional pattern of trade in hand-pounded rice involving a number of intermediaries, viz. *baniwalahs*, *kistiwalahs*, *goladars* and *mahajan/aratdars* at different levels, had altogether disappeared. What had emerged in its place was a sort of barter trade involving a much lower quantity of paddy. For instance, the appearance of a number of rice mills in Bolpur, Sainthia and Dubrajpur in the district of Birbhum had created such an immense pull on the local supplies of paddy in the mid 1920's as to leave nearly no stock of it for commercial hand-pounding.²²² The small amount of trade in *dhenki*-husked rice that was still available at village hats²²³ had almost ceased during the 'Control' days.²²⁴

III : 2. Rice Mill and the paddy trade :

Therefore, the flow of *dhenki*-husked rice from the districts to Calcutta was now replaced by the flow of paddy. The increasing number of rice mills in the districts since the second decade of the twentieth century brought about a further dislocation in the inland paddy/rice trade. The district rice mills affected the existing pattern of paddy/rice trade in two ways : it considerably reduced the flow of paddy from the districts to Calcutta and it led to the growth of new rice trading interests in the districts. These changes were of immense significance not only for the inland trade but also for the whole rice economy of the province.

The falling supplies of paddy from the districts, particularly from those having rice mills to Calcutta meant the increasing reallocation of the available supplies of paddy in the districts to other consuming centres. In addition to the demand from the Calcutta mills, often having much higher productive capacity than others, rice mills now founded in the districts, created fresh pulls on a relatively unchanging supply of paddy, thus creating a competition, hitherto unknown in the primary markets.²²⁵ The proximity to the sources of supply had largely accounted for the success of the district mills in procuring a larger share of the local produce, than their metropolitan counterparts.

Already in the 1920's the two surplus districts of Midnapore and Burdwan²²⁶ had nearly stopped sending paddy to Calcutta.²²⁷ The industry had an early growth in these areas and the surplus stock available in the local markets was diverted to the district mills. Soon the local supplies of paddy failed to meet the growing requirement of the local mills. Kalidas Bagchi, S. D. O. Jangipore, Murshidabad reported in 1926 that rice mills of Katwa in Burdwan regularly purchased paddy from Murshidabad.²²⁸ A survey of the industry in the mid-1940's showed that the available local supplies of paddy in Burdwan did not justify the total milling capacity of the local rice mills.²²⁹ This explains why the Burdwan mills had regularly to import a considerable quantity of paddy from the neighbouring districts,²³⁰ as was done by the Midnapur mills, which were partially fed by the Orissa paddy.²³¹ In a similar way growth of this

industry had greatly reduced the outflow of paddy from the districts like Birbhum and Bankura²³² and from Dinajpur as well.²³³

The immense pull created by the Birbhum mills on the paddy available in the district has been noted earlier.²³⁴ Chittapriya Mukherji's study on the Bolpur rice mills in the early 1960's revealed that most of the district mills had been suffering from an acute under-utilization of their installed capacities,²³⁵ — a trend which had started as early as the late 1920's.²³⁶ In an attempt to overcome this problem of under-utilization the mills of Bolpur, Sainthia, Dubrajpur and Ahmadpur started procuring paddy from the adjacent district of Murshidabad,²³⁷ as also from some other sources such as Orissa.²³⁸

The growth of rice mills in the mofussil areas, therefore, nearly terminated the out-flow of paddy from the rice milling districts to Calcutta and other large milling centres of the province like Howrah. The suburban mills had affected the movement of paddy from the non-milling districts as well. Thus the appearance of rice mills in Dinajpur had diverted the existing Bogra-Calcutta river traffic in paddy to the new rice milling centre of Hilli in Dinajpur.²³⁹ The mills of Parbatipur also drew largely on the supplies of paddy from Jalpaiguri district, which would have otherwise passed to the Calcutta mills.²⁴⁰ The large purchases made by the rice mills of Birbhum from the markets of Murshidabad district has been noted above.

This process of replacement of the supply of paddy from the districts to Calcutta by that of the milled rice led to the emergence of new commercial interests in the districts, which on their own found out new trade channels, quite independent of the Calcutta trade nexus.

As early as 1924, a group of Midnapore traders were thus found to have been exporting rice directly to Madras, Mauritius and other places via the Calcutta port.²⁴¹ The establishment of a number of rice mills in Bankura in the 1920's similarly reversed the existing trade practice of sending paddy to Calcutta. Indeed, the milled rice now began to flow from Bankura to the industrial markets of Asansol, Raniganj, Durgapur, Kharagpur and also to Adra, Jharia,

Tatanagar in Bihar. Calcutta and other towns like Barrackpore also received rice supplies from Bankura.²⁴² The rice mills in Bankura, therefore, offered the local traders an opportunity to earn profits from two sources: procurement of paddy and trading in the milled rice. Often mill owners themselves seized this opportunity to add to their incomes. Thus in nine cases out of ten rice was exported by mill owners of Burdwan.²⁴³ Similarly, the District officer of Birbhum observed in 1926: "Mill-owners export the rice to Calcutta after milling" or that "Most rice exported goes via the local mills."²⁴⁴

In fact, growth of rice mills in close proximity to the sources of supply of the raw material in the districts had given the local traders a competitive cost advantage enabling them to outmanoeuvre their big brothers of Calcutta. The spread of rice milling in the districts since the second decade of the twentieth century thus resulted in a slackening of the grip of the Calcutta traders and rice manufacturers over the internal rice trade of the province. Significantly, it was also the period of a steady decline in the overseas export of rice from Calcutta.²⁴⁵ In some cases, again, the district rice mills only helped to broaden the existing channels of rice trade. Thus rice mills of Dinajpur²⁴⁶ led to replacement of the supply of hand-pounded rice by milled rice and had also increased the volume of this trade with Bihar and the United provinces.²⁴⁷

III : 3. Later Changes

The changes thus brought about by the district mills the falling supply of paddy to Calcutta and the growth of an independent powerful rice trading interest in the districts were of considerable importance for the entire rice economy of the province.

3 : 1. Increasing competition

The falling supply of paddy to Calcutta from the districts had hit hard the large-scale rice manufacturing interests of the city and the resultant crisis manifested itself in a number of ways. The progressive decline in the rate of growth of rice mills in the Calcutta-Howrah region²⁴⁸ was largely attributable to a corresponding fall in the supply of paddy from the districts. For a short while, the

Calcutta mills tried to overcome this problem by importing cheaper varieties of paddy from Burma. Between 1928 and 1936, Bengal had an annual import of paddy from Burma, amounting to 19·5 thousand tons on an average.²⁴⁹

More significant was the competition that these changes brought about in the paddy market all over Bengal. Before going into the details of its different forms and its impact on the trade and the rice economy of the province, we need to analyse the exact nature of the crisis, faced by the large rice manufacturing interests of Calcutta. The crisis was mainly one of under-utilization of the installed capacity of mills caused by the reduced inflow of paddy in the context of the rapidly expanding market for the finished product, i.e. rice, both inland and overseas. While the capital investment in the Calcutta mills was in general much larger, and the mills had a ready access to the more organized markets of the city, the proximity to the sources of raw materials supply and the lower cost per unit of rice processed had given the district mills a distinctive advantage over the metropolitan ones, including mainly those units which were established in the non-producing areas of Calcutta, Twenty-Four Parganas and Howrah. Initially, the mills of Howrah had a greater stake than the Calcutta mills in procuring paddy in requisite quantities from the hinterland, which also supplied paddy to the mills of Midnapore, Burdwan and Hooghly. The Calcutta mills, on the other hand, had almost an uninterrupted supply of paddy from the eastern districts, notably Jessore, Khulna and Bakarganj,²⁵⁰ till the Partition had diverted this flow to an altogether different direction.

3 : 2. Agency System :

The Calcutta mills engaged contractors and rice procuring agents in the districts. As early as 1926, the Calcutta houses usually lifted through their agents most of the *aman* crop brought to the local markets of Jalpaiguri.²⁵¹ In most cases Marwari traders located in the districts worked for the metropolitan mills and served as a useful linkage between the primary market and the great Calcutta market of the staple.²⁵² In the jute producing districts of Bengal they had been assisted in this regard by their very extensive network for collecting, despatching and storage of jute. For instance, in Rangpur *araddars* used to combine their trade in jute with trade in paddy and

sent the stock to Calcutta.²⁵³ In Bogura *aratdars* procured paddy for the outstation merchants and got a commission of Rs. 4 per hundred maunds of paddy.²⁵⁴ In Bankura *mahajans* or their agents exporting paddy to Calcutta were financed by the Calcutta mills.²⁵⁵ Often the Marwari and other up-country merchants combined to eliminate competition at the local markets.²⁵⁶ Agents of the bigger Calcutta houses regularly visited such distant places as Orissa, Hazaribag, Gaya, Sitamahri and the Santhal Parganas in Bihar and sent supplies of paddy in bulk from there to Calcutta.²⁵⁷

In fact by the 1920's most of the mill owners and traders of Calcutta having large-scale dealing in paddy made bulk of their purchases at the primary markets, either directly or through their agents. Likewise, the big mill owners of the districts had lots of agents for the purchase of paddy.²⁵⁸

A similar readjustment in the existing practices of trade was also noticeable in the case of the rice trading mahajans of Calcutta, not having any manufacturing interest. Thus in the 1920's the Teli *mahajans* of Kumartuli and Hatkhola in Calcutta were found procuring rice through their purchasing centres in the districts. The Telis dominated the rice trade in Nadia where they had their godowns in all important market places. Later the Kumartuli-Hatkhola *mahajans* started purchasing paddy from the district markets. They bought *balam* paddy from Barisal and husked them in small huller machines in Kumartuli and sold the finished rice to the Calcutta market.²⁵⁹

The transaction also involved the service of the *kistiwalah* ferrying rice/paddy from the mofussil markets to Calcutta godowns. Also striking is the desire of Teli *mahajans* of Kumartuli to continue their trade independent of the larger milling interest of the city, which explains why they had patronized the mushroom growth of rice hullers in Kumartuli almost in the form of a cottage industry. "Nowadays every house in Kumartuli had its huller fitted with electric engines", reported a contemporary observer in the 1920's.²⁶⁰

3 : 3. Direct Dealing :

In view of the increasing competition in the primary markets of paddy the district mills on their part started direct purchase from

cultivators, independent of all intermediaries.²⁶¹ Thus Mr. H. Quinton, I.C.S, the District Officer, Birbhum wrote in Nov. 1926 : "There are about 25 large mills in the district. Most of the paddy grown finds its way to these mills. Either producers or buyers bring the paddy in carts to the mills."²⁶² The district mills made these purchases mostly in the harvesting months of October-December, when market arrivals were heavy and consequently the price of paddy was low. Under this system of direct purchase the cultivator assembled with their produce at the mill gate. The mill official then inspected the paddy and offered the mill price. The cultivator was free to negotiate his sale price but in reality the mill price generally prevailed. The paddy was then weighed and payment made to the cultivator in cash.²⁶³

The system of direct dealing had considerably strengthened the position of the district rice mill, vis-a-vis the metropolitan one. Because of their specific location the district mill alone could have a direct deal with the cultivator. The rice mill always preferred to buy straight from the cultivator as the mill was thus able to purchase at a lower rate than the one they would have to pay a *pharia*, who was a shrewed businessman and well-informed of the market rates.²⁶⁴ Thus the system of direct purchase from the grower was found prevalent in 1926 in the districts of Midnapore, Howrah and Hooghly.²⁶⁵ Later it also spread to other districts like Birbhum, Bankura and Burdwan with the development of roads.²⁶⁶

3 : 4. Dadan by Rice Mill :

The increasing competition at the primary markets also led to the system of *dadan* payment by some rice mills both to traders and to cultivators. In the traditional structure of rice trade in Bengal *dadan* in the form of cash advances by the trader to the producer was relatively unknown. What existed was a sort of trade credit given by the bigger merchant — the *mahajan*, *aratdar*, *goladar* to the intermediary trader at the lower levels of trade, such as the *paikar*, *pharia* and *bepari*. A contemporary observer reporting on the rice trade of Ramkrishnapur in Howrah as early as 1904 stated that the *aratdar* there offered *dadans* to the *baniwalah mahajan* and the *bepari* at the rate of one rupee per maund of hand - pounded rice.²⁶⁷

The strong export trade link and the growing demand from the Calcutta urban market largely accounted for the introduction of the system. In rural Bengal, cultivators generally received *dadān* in the form of cash advances from the money lender and also sometimes from the Zamindar and Jotedar. "All these loans", wrote S. A. Latif, Sub-Divisional Officer of Satkhira, to the Collector of Khulna in 1926, "are advanced on condition that the cultivator should either pay a fixed quantity of paddy or a rate of interest varying from 37.5 to 75 per cent per annum."²⁶⁸

We have a classic description of the working of the system from Mohim Chandra Datta, Khas Tahasildar, Kutubdia in Chittagong.

"It (*Dadān*) is in use here on a very small scale . . . It is only the poorest cultivators, . . . who accept *dadān*. The amount of *dadān* varies according to the number of years in which the stipulated amount of paddy is paid.

In yearly payment the standing *dadān* is Rs. 40 per 100 *aris* (a unit of measurement. 1 *ari* = 9 seers) of paddy i.e. if a man takes Rs. 40 in *Baisakh* or *Jaistha* (April-May or May-June), he has got to pay 100 *aris* of paddy in the following *Agrahayan* (i.e. November-December), which is the harvesting month.

In three or four-yearly system the *dadān* varies from Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 for 100 *aris* of paddy, that is, if a man wishes to pay 100 *aris* of paddy in three or four instalments in three or four years he can get Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 in advance.

As for the last few years the average price of 100 *aris* of paddy in the harvesting season has been upwards of Rs. 60 while it goes for higher in the rains.

The system of *dadāns* as noted above means good loss on the part of the people who accept it. So the *dadān* system is resorted to only under unavoidable circumstances."²⁶⁹

Thus *dadān* was a form of usurious capital, related to paddy supply because the realisation of loan from the indebted cultivator was easier in kind than in cash. It was this form of realisation of loan which compelled the rural money lender to work as a trader also, trading in the produce that he had received from the cultivator debtor. To the parasitic class of Zamindar and Jotedar on the other hand *dadān* was more an instrument of recycling the production than a form of money investment. A.S. Larkin thus wrote

from Midnapore in 1927: "Seeds of paddy are often given in advance by the tenure holder to the raiyats and recouped after the harvesting is over."²⁷⁰

Under the existing system, therefore, the mercantile and manufacturing capital was not invested in giving *dadān* to paddy-growing cultivators, as it was done in most cases of cash crop cultivation in Bengal. The growth of the rice milling industry thus encouraged both the miller and the trader of rice to provide credit to the cultivator in order to ensure a secure supply of their produce. The steady growth of an export trade in rice mainly from Calcutta and the growing urban market of rice were other complementary factors.

Rice mills made advances to producers on the security of the standing crop, mostly through their contractors, but also directly in some cases, at the prevailing market rate, since unlike jute prices, paddy prices did not widely fluctuate.²⁷¹ In 1926 *dadān* in the form of cash advances to cultivators by rice mills and their agents had come into existence with varying degrees in the rice milling districts of Burdwan, Midnapore, Hooghly and in the non-milling areas like Murshidabad, Nadia and Jalpaiguri.²⁷² In the Jangipur sub-division of Murshidabad rice mills usually made advances at the rate which was a little less than half of the highest rate of paddy prevailing at the district markets in the previous year. In Nadia the rate was four annas less than the market price of the earlier year.²⁷³

Significantly, the system of rice mills and their contractors making advances to paddy cultivators did not spread to all the rice producing districts of Bengal. It came into existence mainly in those areas, where the metropolitan mills had to face greater competition from the local rice mills in paddy markets, as in Midnapur and Burdwan. In the districts like Birbhum and Bankura, the local supply of paddy increasingly failed to match the total pulls created by the Calcutta trade agencies and the district mills. Despite the fact that it had come into existence rather late in these districts, the *dadān* system thus rapidly increased in the following decades.²⁷⁴ It was also introduced in the non-milling areas of Nadia and Murshidabad, predominantly by the Calcutta mills. In some other

areas, as in Mymensingh, where the system of *dadān* was not much in vogue, Marwari traders and *aratdars* working for the Calcutta mills often resorted to it during the years of scarcity to avoid any dislocation in the supply.²⁷⁵ Similarly, the Sahas of Tangail, who practically governed the rice market of the sub-division to the extent that direct dealing between producers and consumers at the local *hats* was almost non-existent, offered *dadāns* on a small scale to the marginal producers.²⁷⁶

The near absence of *dadāns*, either by rice mills or their agents in the great rice-producing districts of Khulna and Bakarganj,²⁷⁷ was largely due to their relative inaccessibility to mills other than those of Calcutta, who had easier river links with these areas. The difficulty of transport also explains the absence of the system in the north Bengal districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Bogura, which largely fed the Dinajpur mills.²⁷⁸

III : 4. Post-partition changes :

4 : 1. Dislocation of supply

The cessation of the flow of paddy from the eastern and the delta districts of Bengal to Calcutta necessitated a further reallocation of the supplies of paddy available in the region renamed as West Bengal. Of the supplies of paddy available to the mill sector a larger part was increasingly diverted again to the unregistered sector of the industry, i.e. to be husked in the small hulling units. The number of such units increased very rapidly in the post-partition period.

The cessation of the supplies of paddy from eastern districts to Calcutta had brought about, what Chittapriya Mukherji called, hazardous competition and further complications in the wholesale rice trade of Bengal in the 1950's.²⁷⁹

4 : 2. Domination of Big Capital :

We have noted earlier that this change most adversely affected the Calcutta mills. In order to ensure smooth working of their mills the rice milling giants of Calcutta desperately tried to have a

secure supply base. These millers, mostly immigrant Marwari and Agarwal traders, soon developed a closely knit inter-district network for purchasing paddy and established a kind of informal control on the wholesale rice trade of the province.²⁸⁰ The control of Marwari traders on wholesale rice trade of the province was already on the rise in the 1920's, about which the local press was extremely critical.²⁸¹ However, they did not have at the time any such control over the internal paddy market.²⁸² The partition of Bengal and the consequent dislocations in the paddy trade, together with the growing competition in the rice milling business, led to the growth of a similar control of Marwari traders on the internal paddy market too.

4 : 3. The crisis of the small mills :

Increasingly, therefore, the small rice mill owners found it difficult to compete with these traders. For instance, a Bolpur miller stated in an interview that more resourceful immigrant traders with their network of agencies and establishments in Calcutta often resorted to an artificial spurt in prices to drive out lesser buyers from the primary markets of paddy.²⁸³ The crisis of the local millers in the post-partition period had also other forms. A micro-study of the rice milling industry of Birbhum in the early 1960's revealed that a large number of the rice mills in Bolpur suffered from an acute under-utilization of the milling capacity.²⁸⁴ The Secretary of Birbhum Rice Mills Association (a miller of Bolpur), while submitting his annual report at the meeting of the association in 1964, referred to problems of the industry and observed : "... instead of taking over the mills, the government should take steps to mechanize production by using such by-products as rice bran oil, branmeal, husk charcoal etc."²⁸⁵

The problem had its origin in an earlier period. For instance, in the 1930's some of the enterprising millers of Sainthia and Ahmedpur in Birbhum started using the refuse husk for fuelling their boilers "Boilers that did not have the gadget for using any other fuel than coal, were renovated sometime in the early thirties and were made suitable to use husk."²⁸⁶ Some others even tried to use the bran for producing oil or making it suitable for the biscuit

industry. Lack of funds, however, stood in the way of installing necessary gadgets for this. Shortage of capital was particularly acute among the millers of Bolpur.²⁸⁷ It may be stated here that a large majority of the millers of Sainthia and Ahmedpur were immigrant Marwari traders, while most of the Bolpur millers were local businessmen, whose interest was absolutely confined to their locality. It also explains why the Bolpur mills suffered a much larger change in ownership in the following period than the two other centres stated above.

4 : 4 Impact of the changes :

The local millers also tried other means. With the primary markets of paddy getting much more competitive in the post-partition period, district mills extended the system of direct dealing with cultivators and consequently the system of *dadān*. Some even resorted to illegal exactions from cultivators such as *Iswarbritti*, *Dhalta* and others^{287a}.

In some places increasing competition led to some readjustments of the established trade practices. The Jalpaiguri mills thus started the practice of forward purchase of the paddy still standing on the field.²⁸⁸ In the marketing of paddy this was a new development altogether. It had helped the local millers to have an edge over the outside agencies buying paddy from the district. And since Jalpaiguri was a predominantly rice-producing area and had a good reputation for some of its varieties, the paddy markets in the district were more competitive. The other reason was that the rice milling industry in this district, starting late in the mid 1930's,²⁸⁹ had to encounter greater competition in the local markets already dominated by the large rice milling interests of the province. It may be recalled here, that as early as in 1926, the Calcutta houses lifted through their agents most of the *aman* crop brought to the local markets of Jalpaiguri.²⁹⁰ The system of advance buying was later followed also by the Bolpur rice mills.²⁹¹

Some of the local millers again tried to organize the marketing of finished rice in order to get a better price of their products. Thus in Birbhum rice mills regularly engaged contractors and

brokers to organize marketing of their products in remote places outside their district. The brokers and other agents regularly contacted the *aratdars* and wholesale traders located in the distant markets, made contracts on behalf of the rice mill owners and earned their commission.²⁹² This practice of selling through brokers and paid agents gave rise to a new consignment system known in the district as *bilicut*.²⁹³

That the local millers, particularly those having limited resources, were not much successful in their attempts to continue in the trade was evident from two trends visible in the post-partition period : (1) the increasing number of cases of selling or leasing out of the local mills to more resourceful and enterprising millers, mostly of Calcutta, and largely immigrant Marwari traders, and (2) the increasing domination of big capital over the rice milling industry of Bengal. The two trends were interrelated. Chittapriya Mukherji's study on the Bolpur mills illustrates this trend.

He points out how with the increasing hazards of the business from the late 1930's, the local millers of Bolpur started leasing out their mills to immigrant millers, with the result that by the early 1960's the financial control of ten mills out of the nineteen in the town passed to these traders.²⁹⁴

A few of such cases would further explain the point. In 1931 Ramana Chandra Das, a weaver by caste, leased out one of his two mills to Purusottam Baiti belonging to the Maheswari caste of Rajasthan, at an annual rental of Rs. 1751.²⁹⁵ In 1951 a merchant—Zamindar, *gandhabanik* by caste, leased out his rice mill to a Calcutta trader of the same caste on an annual rental of Rs. 6,000.²⁹⁶ Similarly in 1963 one of the oldest mills of the town, with a record of uninterrupted ownership since its establishment in 1924, was leased out at the annual rate of Rs. 18,000 to one Agarwala of Behala (Calcutta). Surprisingly, the owner of this mill, an old resident of the town, now opted for a safe investment and later changed over to cloth selling.²⁹⁷ The control of the Bolpur mills, therefore, gradually passed to the financially stronger millers of Calcutta, most of whom were immigrants from other states.

Significantly, the annual lease value of the rice mills in Bolpur increased from Rs. 1751 in 1931 to as much as Rs. 18,000 in 1963.

The data relating to the size-group distribution of the Bolpur mills indicated that the productive capacity of the mills did not undergo any major change between the 1930's and the 1960's.²⁹⁸ The total flow of paddy to the Bolpur mills also remained largely unchanged, although the paddy cultivation had considerably increased during the period.²⁹⁹ Under the circumstances, the steep rise in the lease value of the mills, even allowing for the bargaining skill of the parties involved in the transactions, or for other factors, indicated a similar rise in the profit expectancy of the mills in question. It is striking that while the immigrant businessmen or other Calcutta traders taking lease of the Bolpur mills expected higher profits and accordingly paid higher lease prices, the local millers of Bolpur increasingly considered rice milling an unprofitable pursuit. The original owners of the Bolpur mills, therefore, preferred to give up rice milling altogether and counted trade as a safer investment.³⁰⁰ Many of them considered it safer to lease out their mills to the Calcutta millers.³⁰¹

Lack of proper evidence make it difficult to examine these trends with reference to other important centres of the rice milling industry of the state. However, there are indications that in the post-partition period this important industry of the state, which had been a predominantly Bengali business even in the 1930's,³⁰² passed under the control of the more resourceful and enterprising traders of Calcutta, most of whom were immigrant merchants. The industry ceased to be a business of small capital.

The failure of the millers having limited capital was largely due to the informal control of the more substantial millers over the wholesale paddy and rice trade of the province. Both in the buyer's market of the raw materials and in the seller's market of the finished product, the lesser miller faced an informal but effective control by larger millers, the dominant section of whom were Marwari businessmen. Located in the districts, with established trading and procurement network, Marwari traders preferred to serve the interest of Marwari millers, local or outstation, and vice versa. In some cases again these businessmen had their agencies in the rice surplus states in other parts of India. In its representation to the Minimum Wages Advisory Committee for Rice Mills, the Calcutta Rice Mills

Association pointed out, among other things, that the local mills suffered due to an unequal competition from other states.⁸⁰³ For instance, in 1956 the immigrant millers having milling interest in other states or close connection with it, imported eight lakh maunds of rice from the mills of U.P. and M.P. The lower wage levels at these places made it worthwhile for them to import rice from such distant places.⁸⁰⁴ The competition from the husking mills further worsened the position of small millers. Improvement of communication, better roads, increased availability of electricity and the refugee rehabilitation scheme — all these had an important contribution to the growth of small husking units, while the improved technology led to the falling cost of processing per unit. Often the big millers worked a number of such units, located in remote villages, and collected through them paddy for the parent mill. All these resulted in a significant shift of the available supplies of paddy from the old fashioned mills, where processing was relatively costlier, to the husking units. The rising prices of paddy and labour were other important contributory causes for the failure of small millers.

IV. Rice Mill and the Paddy-growing Peasantry :

How did the capitalist enterprise in rice processing almost entirely depending on peasants for the supply of paddy affect the small peasant economy? Unlike the Bombay sugar mills, rice mills in Bengal did not have any landed estates to meet their paddy requirement.

IV. 1. Rice Mill and the Paddy Cultivation :

The growth of the rice milling industry could not change the structure of production of this prime crop of Bengal. Even at the end of the period under study the entire quantity of paddy produced in this province continued to be grown by small peasants. George Blyn's estimates reveal that between 1891 and 1947 the rice production in greater Bengal decreased at an annual rate of 0.77 percent.⁸⁰⁵ M.M. Islam's study of the period 1920-1946 agrees with Blyn's finding. Islam's estimates, however, show a somewhat smaller rate of decline, 0.3 percent annually.⁸⁰⁶ The causes of this decline

include a static or falling acreage under paddy and a declining yield per acre, particularly the yield of winter rice.⁸⁰⁷ It is important to note that the spectacular growth of the rice milling industry during all these years could in no way influence these trends of rice cultivation in Bengal. It was true even of the western districts of Bengal having a larger concentration of rice mills,⁸⁰⁸ and a region where rice-trade was fairly well-organised.⁸⁰⁹

In some other cases the creation of an industrial demand for his crop induced the peasant to extend its cultivation. Thus the growth of the jute manufacturing industry in Bengal led to a significant expansion of the area under jute cultivation. The productivity of jute had also increased, albeit slowly, at the annual rate of 0.2 percent during the later part of the period as a whole (1920-1946).⁸¹⁰ Similarly, the cotton mills of Western India eventually led to the introduction of the long-staple variety of cotton in India and also resulted in an increase of cotton yield per acre.⁸¹¹ The sugar mills seem to have a more positive impact on the cultivation of sugarcane in India. Thus the acreage under improved varieties of sugarcane had a growth of 309 per cent between 1930-1937, while the average yield had increased by 27 percent during the same period.⁸¹² A more recent study on the sugar mill industry in the Gorakhpur district of U. P. clearly reveals this correlation between the expanding demand of the local industries and the increasing acreage under sugar cane in the area. Thus Gorakhpur's cane acreage had a growth of 68.46 per cent between 1911 and 1936, when the number of sugar mills in the district had increased from one in 1911 to twenty three in 1936.⁸¹³

However, certain other factors were also important. For instance, irrigation had a positive part to play, which explains why the cultivation of long-staple cotton had been introduced in the irrigated region of Punjab-Sind and not in the cotton growing tracts of Western India. Even then its introduction had to await the creation of a steady demand for such a variety of cotton in Indian markets from indigenous cotton mills, encouraged by tariff protection to produce finer varieties of piecegoods.

It is, therefore, really intriguing why the development of rice milling industry in Bengal did not have the same kind of impact on the cultivation of paddy in the province.

By the nature of their functions rice mills belonged to a category quite different from that of jute, cotton and sugar mills. Unlike the latter rice mills did not bring about any qualitative change in the nature of their final product. It may be pointed out here that diversification of the rice mill's product — *viz*, rice bran oil, husk charcoal, bran meal etc. — started only recently and that too mostly on an experimental basis.⁸¹⁴ As such, rice mill by itself could neither influence the existing nature of demand for the rice crop nor could add to it to any material extent.

For the bulk of his paddy production the cultivating peasant did not require any inducement whatsoever. He would always try to grow whatever paddy he required for his subsistence and also seed. His basic requirement also included the crop equivalent of his rent and customary communal obligations. Under normal conditions, therefore, it was the quantum of paddy grown beyond this basic requirement that actually entered into the marketing process. Such a description simplifies a complex reality. The quantum of paddy required for rent payment was of course marketed. Some peasants had plots too small to feed them all the year round. Even then they had to sell a part of their produce to meet their many obligations and to pay for other necessities of life. Again, in some areas, cultivators having an income from crops like jute, tobacco, potato etc. were relatively less dependent on paddy for their cash requirement. However, the notion of the peasant's basic requirement and of the marketable surplus is useful for a general understanding of the situation. The paddy-growers' attitude to this surplus production was usually determined by the price expectancy of paddy relatively to the additional cost of its production as also to the actual returns from competitive crops.

During the greater part of the period studied here the major competitor of rice was jute. In some districts the acreage under jute increased at the cost of rice.⁸¹⁵ The rice yield had declined due to the shift of better lands from rice to jute,⁸¹⁶ or due to rotation planting with jute.⁸¹⁷ It may be misleading, however, to emphasize the importance of this substitution factor. Jute, it was found, accounted for only 9 per cent of the total crop acreage in Bengal as against the winter rice having a share of 59 per cent. So

far as the land use was concerned, it was only autumn rice, which was a direct alternative to jute. That the productivity of the autumn rice did not decline or that the jute yield increased only marginally indicated that the alleged transfer of better land to jute was only of limited importance. According to a recent study, the remarkable expansion of double cropping, mostly on the land under winter rice, had a more important role in reducing its productivity. And since the winter rice represented the bulk of the rice grown in this province, its declining yield had largely neutralized the benefits of the introduction of improved variety of seeds or the increased rice acreage in the 1940's.⁸¹⁸

Therefore, the peasants' response to any kind of external inducement to grow rice (beyond his basic requirement) was relative to his response to other crops, including not only jute but also sugarcane, tobacco and the increasing variety of rabi crops with which rice had to share lands increasingly on a double cropping basis. And since there was no appreciable change in the other inputs of production during this period all these had only reduced the productivity of rice. Under such circumstances, the peasant could still decide to concentrate on rice production provided it paid him to do that. Or if he felt that the supply of his basic requirement was threatened by certain extraneous factors such as famine.

Apparently, the rice milling industry did provide certain inducements to which peasants should have more favourably reacted. That they did not was evident from the declining trends in the output and from the static rice acreage. As stated above, the rice mill by expediting the work of processing and minimising its cost had increased the volume of rice trade. It also offered cheaper credit to peasants and had created new channels of communication with them. With the increasing number of rice mills, the trade in paddy became more and more competitive and the distance between the peasant producer and the market for his product decreased. Consequently, peasants should normally have got better prices for their products. However, most of these benefits were only marginal in nature.

1 : 2 Impact of rice mills on the peasantry : Dadan.

Compared to the credit supplied to cultivators by the traditional village moneylender, *dadan*, as given by the rice mill, was definitely cheaper. But the rice mill's role as a new credit agency in the small peasant economy of Bengal during our period was essentially limited.

Firstly, the system of *dadan* in the form of cash advances to paddy-growers by rice mills or any of their contractors came into existence mainly in the central-western districts of Bengal, where the availability of a sizeable marketable surplus, the more organized nature of the rice trade and the concentration of a large number of rice mills had made the primary markets of paddy here more competitive than elsewhere. The relatively greater flow of cash and credit to cultivators of eastern and northern Bengal through jute cultivation had also an important influence on the geographical distribution of the *dadan* system, as introduced by the rice mill.

Secondly, even in the central-western districts of Bengal only a small number of peasants could avail themselves of this new opportunity of cheaper credit. The large scale distribution, proper administration and timely realization of *dadan* required a large capital investment, which most of the rice mills could hardly afford. Limited capital had thus forced a large number of rice mills to buy paddy from the *aratdar* on credit.³¹⁹ A few others, instead of buying paddy on their own account, only processed the grain for *aratdars*, *mahajans* and other traders, which only lowered the margin of profit for the miller.³²⁰ There is also evidence of the rice mills borrowing funds from the loan companies.³²¹

In fact, the general pattern of capital investment in the rice milling industry of the province did not justify a liberal distribution of *dadan* either to a large number of peasants or over a wide geographical area. The fact that the *dadandar* rice miller had to keep idle his capital engaged in *dadan* for nearly six to seven months was perhaps far more decisive in dissuading him from making *dadans* on a large scale.

Thirdly, rice mills had other constraints too. The full procurement of its total annual requirement of paddy through *dadan* transaction

implied that the mills had the necessary storage and other facilities for handling such a huge turn over of raw material at the harvest time. The average rice mill in Bengal lacked such facilities. Thus the general practice among the Bolpur millers was to buy only three months' requirement at the harvest season and to purchase the rest from intermediary traders at intervals.⁸²²

Fourthly, the available scope for dealing directly with the cultivator generally discouraged the mofussil mills to distribute *dadān*. They knew that they would get as much paddy as they could store from growers of the surrounding areas. In some areas again, mills usually preferred advancing credit to a few rich peasants-cum-seasonal traders to distributing it among all and sundry cultivators. It required smaller investment, lesser monitoring and still ensured the same volume of supply as desired by the mill. In lower Birbhum some of the village cultivators performed the functions of middlemen after the busy harvesting season was over.⁸²³ In some other districts too affluent peasants performed this role of a *pharia* or a *bepari*.⁸²⁴ *The Report on the marketing of agricultural produce* (1926) stated that in Bankura: "Well-to-do cultivators purchase paddy from the villagers and carry it to the rice mills or *arats* and sell there."⁸²⁵ The rice mills of Bolpur distributed credit among the middlemen, known as *Beparis* in the region, for purchase of paddy in their respective villages.⁸²⁶

Finally, it was the metropolitan mill, which more often than the district mill, resorted to the system of distributing *dadān* among paddy growers through contractors or agents in an area far away from its location and where it had little direct control over the internal markets of paddy. *Dadān*, under such circumstances, was always an advance against the standing crop, usually distributed through the existing groups of traditional intermediaries—the *faria*, *bepari*, *aratdar*, *mahajan* etc.—working then under the *dadandar* rice miller on commission. And since it implied enforced sale of the crop to the *dadandar* at a preferential rate the cultivator accepting *dadān* was a loser in the case of a crop failure, and when higher prices prevailed in the market. Again the *dadandar* here meant to the borrowing cultivator not the distant miller making the advances but his immediate trade intermediary supplying credit to him. As such

the cultivator had little protection against the exactions and frauds practised by these traders, which is discussed later. With the increasing competition at the primary markets of paddy, the system of *dadān* later degenerated into an instrument of compulsion on cultivators to part with their grain at prices lower than the market rates. In 1955 the Rice Milling Committee found the widespread practice of dictation of prices to paddy growers by the *dadāndār* rice millers.³²⁷

On the whole, it appears that only a microscopic minority of the total paddy growing cultivators in Bengal could avail themselves of this new credit opportunity, created by rice mills. And in a situation where bulk of the rice mills' credit to cultivators flowed through the traditional intermediary groups, and where such credit was often arbitrarily realised, quite independent of the market forces, the real beneficiaries of the system in most cases were not cultivators but manipulators of such credit. In fact, it was at the level of the intermediary trade that replacement of the traditional credit agency by rice mills was more complete than at the level of small peasant production.

1 : 3 Rice Mill's impact on the peasantry : Direct Dealing.

Rice mills had also opened up new communication channels with rice growers, making direct purchase of paddy from them, mostly at the harvesting time but also sometimes before it. It has been stated earlier that mills always preferred direct purchase from cultivators to purchase through intermediaries. The cultivator also had a similar preference for a direct deal with rice mills. Thus in the Sadar and Serampore sub-divisions of the Hooghly district, as early as 1926, *beparis* regretted a low profit margin because of the increasing tendency among rice growers to sell their crop directly to mills and of their knowledge of market rates.³²⁸ In 1924 Burdwan peasants showed a similar eagerness for having a direct deal with mills.³²⁹ The micro-study on the marketing of rice at Bolpur in the early 1930's also confirms this trend.³³⁰ The anxiety of Birbhum peasants to assemble their crop at the nearest mill gate immediately after harvest was also noted in later studies.³³¹

Direct dealing with the mill normally ensured to the cultivator a better price deal. The *Report on the marketing of agricultural*

produce in Bengal (1926) thus noted : "Sometimes the millers purchase staple crops direct from the farmers, in which event, all the profits of the several intermediaries which link the producer with the consumer go to the producers themselves."⁸⁸² For instance, in Bolpur, the cultivator had to suffer a levy at the rate of five per cent when selling to the *pharia* as against a deduction of only two and a half per cent by the mill.⁸⁸³ The system also suited the cultivator's demand for cash, which was almost irresistible at the time of the harvest. A dealing with the village shop keeper usually meant delayed payment to the cultivator, and that with an itinerant trader—a *faria* or a *bepari*—meant delayed sale, since under such circumstances the cultivator had to wait for the visit of these traders to his village. The average cultivator could hardly afford either a delayed payment or a delayed sale and as such always preferred having a direct deal with the mill immediately after the harvest.

But his was not a free choice. The cultivator's desire of selling his produce directly to the mill was constrained by the pattern of distribution of rice mills in a district. Thus, while in the Sadar and Serampore sub-divisions of the Hooghly district in 1926 cultivators showed an increasing eagerness to sell their paddy to mills, in the Arambag sub-division of the district they were rather forced to hand over their produce to itinerant traders because of the absence of rice mills in their neighbourhood and partly of the want of proper roads.⁸⁸⁴ Surendra Nath Mukherjee, Sub-Deputy Collector of Sadar Sub-Division, Murshidabad reported in 1926 : "Often times they (cultivators) are forced to dispose of their articles at the choice price of the *mahajans* located at the trade centres because of the disadvantages they find themselves in owing to these centres being far away from their homes."⁸⁸⁵

Secondly, since bulk of the direct purchase by the rice mill was usually made at the mill gate the cultivator had to cart his produce to the assembling centre before the mill. This further limited his choice of having a direct deal with the mill. The *Report on the marketing of agricultural produce in Bengal*, (1926) thus observed with regard to the district of Burdwan : "As the means of communication are not quite encouraging for direct sale from the producer to the mill owners, the cultivators are generally put to great loss."⁸⁸⁶

Direct dealing with the mill, therefore, presupposed that the cultivator must have a cart or he must be able to hire one for the purpose. The distance between his field and the gate point of the purchasing mill also mattered. A micro-study on the marketing of rice at Bolpur in the early 1930's revealed that the producer could cart his produce up to a maximum distance of twenty-five miles, that too only by straining his meagre resources.³²⁷ In 1926 Mr. H. Quinton, the District Officer of Birbhum, thus observed: 'I can suggest no way and means of improving the existing marketing except by improving village and district roads and the draught cattle.'³²⁸

There were of course some exception. The Collector of Hooghly stated :

"Transport facilities are very fair in these two sub-divisions (Sadar and Serampore) ... There is hardly a village, which is more than a mile from some cart road or more than ten miles from a railway station. Producers are thus able to carry the paddy in carts themselves to the *arats*. It is estimated that no less than half the quantity that comes to the *arats* is brought directly by the producers themselves and the remaining half only by the *pharias* or *beparis*."³²⁹

Thirdly, the cultivating peasant had to fulfil various obligations in his village and was not always free to market his produce. He had his rent obligation to the landlord. More important was his obligation to the village moneylender, who was also sometimes a local dealer and a *paikar*.³⁴⁰ Santipriya Bose's study on the marketing of rice at Bolpur noted :

"During the lean months before harvest, the cultivator very often is in need of grain for his own consumption, and is obliged to borrow either paddy or money in cash. As soon as the harvest is over the moneylender puts pressure on the cultivator and buys his grain at a low price. In this case he never receives price he would if he took the produce to a mill."³⁴¹

Similarly, the *faria* also lent money to the cultivator and recovered the same after the harvest. "The cultivator is obliged to sell paddy to the *pharia* although in all probability he would get a better price at a mill and a fairer weight. The *pharias* are generally dishonest and use over-weights."³⁴² Again, "producers very often borrow money from the merchants to finance cultivation, the usual stipulation being the sale of produce to the *mahajans* at rates which

are fixed in advance and which are favourable to the merchants.”³⁴³ The particular form of the production organization, therefore, resulted in the hypothecation of the entire rice crop to the money-lender-cum-grain dealer, thus depriving peasants of any control over the disposal of their crop.

Finally, rice mills also had some difficulties in buying paddy directly from growers, although they could buy cheaper in that way. The most important one was the limited storage capabilities of the average mills. The supply from cultivators at the mill gate was available for one or two months in the harvesting season, while the average mill had a running period of six to eight months. To buy the total annual requirement of raw material from cultivators at the mill gate during the harvesting season would, therefore, necessitate the additional facilities capable of storing atleast six months' raw material requirement. And this in its turn would involve huge initial capital expenses in the construction of building and other facilities. Most of the mills could hardly afford such a kind of investment.

Even when they had the necessary command over capital the average rice millers were simply reluctant to invest in storage. They would buy at a higher price from the *faria* and the *aratdar* rather than construct a huge store house and keep it idle for nearly six months, as a Bolpur miller had put it to S. Bose in a slightly different way.³⁴⁴ Above all, buying all the annual requirement of the raw material from cultivator during the harvesting season necessitated a much greater command over capital, which the average miller often lacked.³⁴⁵ Thus in the Bolpur region, with a very good distribution of rice mills, the direct purchase of paddy from cultivators accounted for only a third of the total mill intake, even though the supply at the mill gates was readily forthcoming during the harvesting months.³⁴⁶ Rice mills were thus obliged to buy from intermediary traders. There is also evidence of the rice mill buying paddy on credit from the *aratdar*.³⁴⁷ The system of direct dealing with cultivators thus could affect only a small fraction of the rice growers in Bengal and as such could not very much alter the existing structure of paddy trade at the primary markets.³⁴⁸

How far did the peasant selling paddy directly to the mill gain thereby?

Lack of statistical evidence makes it difficult for us to reach any firm conclusion. We have stated above that rice mills purchased paddy from cultivators mostly when the supply to the market was larger than usual and the price of paddy low. At the time of the harvest peasants generally had a very little bargaining power "and were always in a hurry to dispose of their produce."³⁴⁹ He was hard pressed by his rent receiver and moneylender, and as such had an irresistible demand for hard cash. His illiteracy, lack of mobility and ignorance of the market conditions would have further reduced his bargaining power. His preference for the mill nearest to his fields also weakened, for obvious reasons, his position as a seller. "So he often lets his produce go at a lower rate than he would receive if he went round a number of mills or *pharias*."³⁵⁰ He was also in a hurry to reach the nearest mill with his produce because the latter would buy from him only for a shorter period or as long as its storage capacity was not exhausted. Under such circumstances, a kind of monopsonistic conditions prevailed at the assembling centres before mill gates, where a large number of peasants assembled with their supplies, all anxious to deliver their crop to the mill before others did. Thus the cultivator had a very little say in determining the price for his produce and had to accept the one offered by mill men.³⁵¹

For instance in 1933-34, the Bolpur mill purchased paddy from cultivators at one rupee six annas per maund,³⁵² when the market price of paddy varied from one rupee five annas to two rupees eight annas per maund.³⁵³ S. Bose estimated the cost of production per maund of paddy in Bolpur at one rupee eight annas per maund for the same year. Thus it appears that the purchase price per maund of paddy, offered by the Bolpur mills to cultivators, was two annas (8.33%) less than its production cost. The cultivator could bear this loss partially because he, along with members of his family, worked on the fields and as such had a considerable saving on the labour cost. In Bose's estimate the labour cost accounted for nearly 34 per cent of the total cost of paddy cultivation.³⁵⁴

The obligation of carting paddy to the mill gate further reduced the cultivator's margin per maund of paddy sale. Want of necessary

data makes it difficult for us to quantify the cultivator's loss on this account. In 1926, S. G. Hart, I.C.S. wrote from Bankura :

"Paddy is brought from cultivators by *mahajans* or their agents and conveyed by carts to the railway stations or to rice mills or *arats*. The cost of carting is about four annas per maund per day in ordinary times, but during the rains the rate may be as much as eight annas."³⁵⁵

It seems unlikely that the *mahajan*/*aratdar* or his agent would engage a cartman at a rate higher than the one at which a peasant would have done it. On the contrary, the hope of an assured job throughout the carting season would rather persuade the cartman, whether a professional carter or not, to work under the *mahajan* at a relatively lower rate. This is evident from the note of the Collector of Hooghly in 1926 : "In this area producers combined together to hire a cart and in such cases the charge seldom exceeded six annas per maund for the longest distance."³⁵⁶ Therefore, the mean of the Bankura and Hooghly rates (i.e. 5 annas per maund of paddy) may be taken as an illustration of the cost of carting a maund of harvest paddy in the western districts of Bengal. The bullock cart in this region enjoyed a near monopoly position as a bulk carrier in the absence of a viable river transport. And its position remained largely unaltered till the development of roads and the coming of automobiles and more particularly cycle vans in these areas from the closing years of our period.

What then was the relative position of the transport cost incurred by the cultivator to the sale price of paddy ?

The average price of rice in the Sadar sub-division of Bankura in 1926 was Rs. 6 and annas 7 per maund.³⁵⁷ Assuming that the harvest price of paddy was usually half of the average annual price of rice,³⁵⁸ the harvest price of paddy in Bankura for the year can be taken as Rs. 3 and annas 3½ per maund. The cost of carting at four annas per maund, as stated above, thus constituted 7·76 per cent of the harvest price of paddy.

In 1926, the average price of rice in the Sadar sub-division of Hooghly was Rs. 7 and annas 10 per maund ³⁵⁹ On the basis of the same assumption cultivators of Hooghly thus appear to have

spent nearly one-tenth (9·83%) of the sale price of paddy per maund (i.e. Rs. 3-13 annas) on transporting it (six annas) to the mill.

The transport by boat in the eastern districts of Bengal was cheaper. The increasing number of steamer ferries made it still more cheaper. The *Bengal Paddy and Rice Enquiry Committee*, thus observed in 1938 : "It is only the cost of transport by boats that has fallen with the decline in the level of commodity prices."⁶⁰ In the western districts of Bengal, having large concentration of rice mills, most cultivators could not avail themselves of this cheaper modes of transport for reasons stated above.

With the rise in the cost of living, the cost of carting also tended to rise over the years, as indicated by the rising cost of hand-pounding. In brief, the obligation of carting paddy to the mill had imposed a considerable burden on cultivators.

Then there were the abusive trade practices, followed both by mill owners and intermediary traders, the forms and extent of which had increased with the growing competition of rice trade in the closing years of the period under study.

First, there was the system of levying *Dhalta*, a kind of weight allowance exacted by rice mills from all persons selling paddy to them, for impurities and the moisture content of paddy. We have three such references relating to three different locales and three different time periods. In 1926, the Burdwan mills exacted *dhalta* at the rate of 2·31 seers per maund of paddy purchased by them (i.e. 5·77%),⁶¹ which was a little higher than the Bolpur rate of 1933-1934. The Bolpur mills in that year exacted *dhalta* at the rate of 2 seers per maund (i.e. 5%).⁶² The *dhalta* charged by the Midnapore mill in the mid-1960's was at the rate of 2·5 seers per maund (i.e. 6·25%) of paddy purchased from cultivators.⁶³ The *dhalta* was also charged by the intermediary trader and the *mahajan/aratdar*, usually at a rate higher than that of the mill.⁶⁴

Another exaction was known as *Iswarbritti*. Originally it was a voluntary contribution made over to the intermediary trader by the paddy-selling cultivator, say of one paise per maund of paddy sold, in the name of God for community work. Thus the District Magistrate of Birbhum in 1926 mentioned Marwari funds in Sainthia

and Bolpur, "ostensibly for religious purposes, which are formed by exactions from traders and sellers in the *hat*. There is so much secrecy about these funds that I doubt whether they are not pure waste or largely for the benefit of one or more individuals".⁸⁶⁶

In course of time the rice mill also practised such illegal exactions. Thus the Bolpur mill in 1933-34 made a compulsory *Iswarbritti* deduction of one paise per cart load of paddy purchased from cultivators.⁸⁶⁸ The system was widely practised in Birbhum. The *Birbhum Barta* (10 June, 1940) thus reported : ".....more than a thousand cultivators of the district have submitted a petition to the Minister for abolition of the system of collecting *Iswarbritti* and *dhalta* by the rice-millers"⁸⁶⁷. The move was in vain. In 1955 *Iswarbritti* collected by the rice mills of Sainthia alone amounted to more than a lakh of rupees.⁸⁶⁸ The system was later abolished by the law. In reality, however, the unauthorized collection of *Iswarbritti* from the cultivators selling paddy to a mill continued under a different pretext. Thus Midnapore mills in 1966, "at the time of making payment" to cultivators made "an unauthorized deduction in the name of charitable purposes at the rate of six naya paise (i.e. six per cent of a rupee) per cart load of paddy or for eight to ten maunds of commodity."⁸⁶⁹

There were other kinds of extortions too from cultivators, anxious to deliver the crop at the nearest mill gate.⁸⁷⁰ Babu Kalidas Bagchi, S.D.O., Jangipur in Murshidabad, thus remarked : "Much cleverness is exhibited by the *Kayals* (weighmen) at the time of measurement and cases are known that a slight pull in the balance can reduce the weight to as much as 2 or 3 seers in maund."⁸⁷¹ While selling paddy to the mill, the cultivator was also cheated by lowly-paid unscrupulous mill officials. They were also exploited by the gate *dalal*, who usually brought the cultivator into contact with the mill and the mill official.

Such abusive trade practices were also adopted by various groups of intermediary traders. S. Bose in his study on the marketing of rice in Bolpur reported :

"Some of the *pharias* also resort to dishonest means. A large number use overweights, when buying from cultivators. The weights are brought from areas where a seer consists of

82.62 tolas instead of 80 tolas, which is the local standard. During the year 1933-34, there were two convictions for using over-weights, but a large number go undiscovered or unprosecuted."⁸⁷²

The practice widely prevailed.⁸⁷³

The cultivator dealing directly with the mill thus did not gain much. Even under such circumstances, he preferred to sell his crop directly to the mill because it ensured a prompt transaction immediately after the harvest and a ready payment in cash.

1 : 4 Impact of Rice Mills on the peasantry : Only a marginally better price deal.

Similarly, cultivators had only a marginal share in the rising prices of paddy as a result of the increasing competition among millers. The *Report on the marketing of agricultural produce in Bengal*, (1926) stated : "the millers create a steady demand. This demand together with the competition between one miller and another helps to raise the price level at the primary markets sufficiently high."⁸⁷⁴ In 1929 the editor of *Birbhum Barta* also noted a rise in the paddy prices in the district from a similar cause.⁸⁷⁵ Such a rise was largely a local phenomenon and as such had only a marginal effect on the general level of paddy prices in Bengal. The paddy growing cultivator hardly benefited by this rise. They sold their crop mostly at the harvest season, when the supply was abundant and the prices low. They also sold mostly through intermediary traders. The middleman often deprived cultivators of the market price of the crop and deprived them in several ways. We have also evidence that middlemen combined to eliminate competition at the local markets.⁸⁷⁶ Competition among millers thus increased the profit margin of the intermediary trade and only occasionally resulted in a better price deal to cultivators.

Two important conclusions emerge from the foregoing discussion. Cultivators only marginally benefited by the growth of the³ rice milling industry. Secondly, the changes brought about by rice mills failed to influence the long term trends in paddy output of the province. Bolpur was one such region, where most of these developments occurred, such as concentration of a large number

of rice mills, competition among the local millers and between the local and metropolitan millers for paddy, *dadān* and direct dealing. Above all, paddy cultivation in Bolpur during the period studied here faced little competition from that of non-food or other food crops. The trend in the paddy cultivation in the Bolpur region thus could be indicative of the correlation between the rice milling industry and the cultivation of paddy.

A micro study of the rice milling industry of Bolpur shows that between 1913 and 1931 (i.e. the period when the industry had its optimum growth in the region) the rice acreage in Bolpur and its adjoining areas had increased. The yield rate of paddy in the region, however, remained stagnant. The study, along with two similar studies of the period, however, attributed the increased paddy acreage not to the growth of rice mills in Bolpur but to the immigration of Santhal labour bringing in sub-marginal lands under rice cultivation, which explains why the cultivation of high yielding varieties in some parts of the region could not influence the overall yield rate of paddy in the region.⁸⁷⁷ The Bolpur case thus only reinforces our earlier conclusion that the rice milling industry had a limited impact on paddy cultivation in Bengal.

The Bolpur millers, like their counterparts in other areas of Bengal, did not take any interest in improving the paddy yield in their region. It is notable that sugar mills of Gorakhpur in U.P. distributed loans and improved seeds among peasants on the condition of hypothecation of the crop.⁸⁷⁸ Rice mills of Bengal did make advances, albeit on a small scale, and make the cultivators hypothecate their crop but did not try to induct better varieties of paddy seeds. Perhaps, they were unable to do that. Unlike the Gorakhpur sugar mills, the rice mills in Bengal, even at the end of our period, had access only to a small part of the total paddy production. As stated above, rice mills had access only to a small portion of the total marketed produce. Bulk of the paddy produced in the province was directly consumed by producers and was husked primarily in the traditional way or in small husking units. Under such circumstances, the rice mill did not consider much worthwhile any long term investment in improving the paddy yield per acre of rice cultivation in Bengal or in any of its regions.

VI : 2 Rice Mill and the system of primary transport : Cart.

We have shown above how the coming of the rice mill had resulted in an increased outflow of paddy from villages. What was its impact on the existing system of primary transport ?

In the pre-mill days bulk of the paddy brought to the market was processed in the villages where it was produced, whether by the peasant family or the village level intermediaries in collaboration with the traditional pounders. The growth of the rice milling industry in Bengal had considerably limited this traditional practice, on the part of both producers and village intermediaries, to sell paddy in the form of rice.

The cultivator or the village shopkeeper, the *pharia* selling a maund of paddy instead of its rice equivalent now needed more carts or cart-trips to carry the paddy out of his village. During the period under study automobiles had practically no impact on the rural transport, not to speak of tri-cycle vans, which was a more recent invention. Coming of rice mills, therefore, should normally have increased either the number of boats and carts in the rural areas, or the rate of utilization of the existing fleet.

Since rice milling was predominantly a western Bengal industry—the region, where the bullock cart was relatively more important than boat as a means of primary transport—the impact of the rice milling industry on rural transport is studied here only with reference to bullock carts.

In studying the impact of rice mills on the local economy of lower Birbhum, H. A. Ali had thus remarked in the 1930's :

“Along with this displacement (of huskers), for example, some new occupations have been opened up as a result of these mills. Apart from the merchants and mill owners, there have come in the cart makers and the carters, some more village middlemen and the coolies engaged in transportation”.⁸⁷⁹

S. Amin in his recent study of sugarcane cultivation in Gorakhpur district has similarly pointed out how the growth of sugar mills in Gorakhpur led to a very substantial increase in the number of bullock carts in the 1930's and how the industry 'gave a fillip to a different

kind of intermediary—the professional carter’.⁸⁸⁰ It is in the light of these arguments that an attempt is made below to examine the exact nature of the rice mills’ impact on rural transport.

Unfortunately, the evidence on this score is scanty. However, *Table : V (A+B)* below, read with reference to *Table II* above, illustrates certain broad trends. It appears that although the number of bullock carts increased in all the districts (*Table V*) between 1920 and 1931, its relationship with the growth of rice mills during the same period is not striking at all. For instance, in the 24-Parganas the number of rice mills increased by 133 per cent between 1920 and 1935; while that of bullock carts increased by only 9.53 per cent during the period from 1920 to 1931. The respective rates of the growth in Burdwan were 155 per cent and only 9 per cent during the same period. In some districts again the linkage was still more tenuous. Thus Birbhum could increase the fleet of its carts by a little over one per cent between 1920 and 1931, when its rice mills had increased by more than tenfold. Similarly, in Bankura and Midnapore the number of carts increased by only 23 per cent and 40 per cent as against the spectacular rates of growth of 700 per cent and 320 per cent respectively in the number of their mills during the same period.

For the period 1931 to 1941, we have an altogether different picture. During this period, all the districts (*Table : V*) suffered a decline in the number of their carts, the rate of decrease compared to 1931 varying from 5.71 per cent to 46.24 per cent. Significantly, the number of rice mills in all these districts except 24 Parganas and Hooghly continued to increase at a rate varying from 2 per cent to 92 per cent between 1935 and 1945, as it appears from *Table : II* above. Two points thus emerge. Between 1920 and 1931 the number of bullock carts increased very slowly, in spite of the significant increase in the number of rice mills during the same time. Secondly, this slow rate of growth 1920-31 was followed by a trend of sharp decline in the number of carts in all the districts in reference between 1931 and 1941, although the number of mills mostly did not decrease.

With these points in mind let us have a look at *Table : VI (A+B)* dealing with the districts having no rice mills. Like the *Table : V* above, *Table : VI* also reveals similar trends : (i) the growing number

Table : V (A)
Bullocks and ploughs in the rice-milling districts of Bengal : 1920-41.

Districts.	Bullocks.					Ploughs.				
	1920-21 = 100	1925-26	1930-31	1940-41		1920-21 = 100	1925-26	1930-31	1940-41	
24-Parganas.	361481	114 33	113·06	91·43		107678	115·37	113·82	118·24	
Burdwan.	278319	104·28	94·88	80·76		129149	110·07	104	94·71	
Birbhum.	237501	100·34	101·41	84·48		107704	99·25	98·53	95·05	
Bankura.	207779	106·26	110·42	35·46		111021	107·38	107·61	80·39	
Midnapore.	589568	112·13	112·45	77·63		287868	109·24	114·42	81·40	
Hooghly	158556	101·52	100·77	96·26		75943	97·81	95·07	95·91	
Howrah.	65296	106·8	106·62	88·05		29683	103·43	86·2	123·45	
Dinajpur.	494837	108·96	98·83	79·45		285038	106·94	97·77	N.A.	

Table : V (B)
Carts and bullocks available per cart in the rice-milling districts of Bengal : 1920-1941.

Districts.	Carts					Bullocks available per Cart				
	1920-21 = 100.	1925-26	1930-31	1940-41		1920-21	1925-26	1930-31	1940-41	
24-Parganas.	33731	109·44	109·53	103·27		10·71	11·19	11·06	9·48	
Burdwan.	73596	116·92	116·89	101·71		3·78	3·37	3·07	3	
Birbhum.	64681	100·43	101·32	88·2		3·67	3·66	3·67	3·51	
Bankura.	48549	113·65	123·16	83·96		4·27	4	3·43	1·8	
Midnapore.	37997	119·66	139·92	91·37		15·51	14·54	12·46	12·58	
Hooghly.	12314	124·37	135·67	121·09		12·87	10·51	9·56	10·23	
Howrah.	1616	146·59	126·05	76·48		40·4	29·43	34·17	46·51	
Dinajpur.	70023	117·49	114·33	121·1		7·06	6·55	6·1	4·63	

Source : Agricultural Statistics of Bengal, of the relevant years. Agriculture and Industries Deptt. Govt. of Bengal.

Table : VI (A) *Bullocks and ploughs in the non-rice mill districts of Bengal : 1920-41.*

Districts.	Bullocks.				Ploughs.			
	1920-21 = 100	1925-26	1930-31	1940-41	1920-21 = 100	1925-26	1930-31	1940-41
Nadia.	320598	112.4	111.44	87.3	133514	113.26	113.09	88.69
Murshidabad.	243062	105.12	96.64	95.33	107583	111.41	106.39	104.5
Jessore.	401848	104.96	99.24	87.28	177028	105.73	99.99	92.33
Khulna.	300117	106.87	103.29	95.48	171153	97.98	95.54	90.47
Rajshahi.	281983	115.85	107.33	154.29	178692	114.62	107.18	114.03
Rangpur.	614039	97.65	95.69	60.23	315592	101.26	98.79	67.44
Bogra.	162976	102.74	107.31	89.27	129178	103.63	102.44	81.76
Pabna.	201234	111.99	105.74	85.74	140593	105.5	100.63	87.15
Malda.	244390	109.26	103	84.75	112170	104.91	105.2	92.58
Faridpur.	392856	99.92	142.29	83.56	160146	97.93	101.87	91.47

Table : VI (B) *Carts and bullocks available per cart in the non-rice mill districts of Bengal : 1920-41*

Districts.	Carts.				Bullocks available per cart.			
	1920-21 = 100	1925-26	1930-31	1940-41	1920-21	1925-26	1930-31	1940-41
Nadia.	48021	119.81	123.72	93.97	6.67	6.26	6.01	6.2
Murshidabad.	59676	117.15	112.97	100.89	4.07	3.65	3.48	3.84
Jessore.	56769	122.06	114.49	89.94	7.07	6.08	6.13	6.86
Khulna.	12432	118.86	109.12	102.84	24.14	21.7	22.85	22.41
Rajshahi.	35176	121.31	114.25	87.75	8.01	7.65	7.53	14.09
Rangpur.	42251	111.71	119.72	80.18	14.53	12.7	11.61	10.91
Bogra.	16557	107.85	117.24	92.44	9.84	9.37	9	9.5
Pabna.	12375	115.61	90.57	129.33	16.26	15.75	18.98	10.78
Malda.	36407	110.2	112.79	96.67	6.71	6.65	6.13	5.88
Faridpur.	1955	115.49	93.86	56.93	200.94	173.85	304.63	294.94

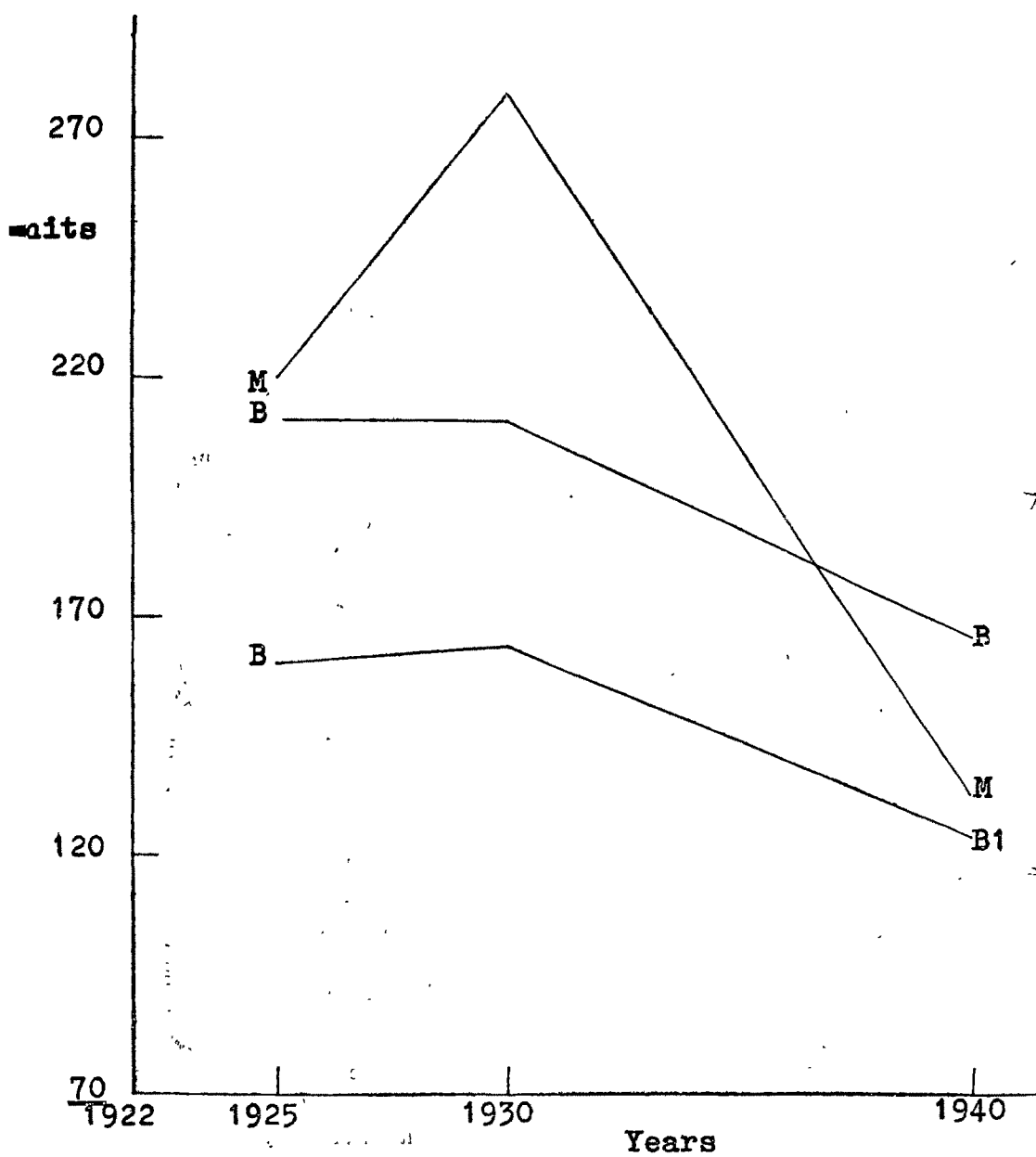
Source : *Agricultural Statistics of Bengal, of the relevant years. Agriculture and Industries Dept., Govt. of Bengal.*

of carts in the earlier period and (ii) a sharp decline in the number of the same in the following one. Significantly, rise in the number of bullock carts in the non-mill districts between 1921 and 1931 was more of an even nature than it was in the case of the rice mill districts during the same period, as shown in *Table : V (A+B)*. Similarly, the decline in the number of carts in the decade 1931 to 1941 was less pronounced in the districts in *Table : VI (A+B)* than it was in the case of the rice mill districts. Thus the rate of decline varied from six per cent to thirty-three per cent in the case of the non-mill districts as against the variation rate of six per cent to forty-six per cent, in the case of the rice mill districts. These trends would be clearly visible from *Graphs : I & II*, below.

The similarity between the two patterns of change in the pool of carts of the districts having rice mills and those without mills thus indicates that the rice milling industry did not have any major impact on the existing modes of primary transport.

One would possibly attribute the rise in the number of bullock carts in the districts having no rice mills in the early period to the growth of jute cultivation. It is notable that even at the height of its cultivation jute was a secondary crop, having only a small share of the total acreage under all crops and that the primary processing of jute was always done by peasant families, which reduced its primary transport requirement. Above all, the districts shown in *Table : VI* had better distribution of rivers and other waterways than most of the rice mill districts. Thus in the areas included in *Table : VI* the boat traffic was always found a viable alternative to carts as a means of primary transport. In most of the rice mill districts, on the other hand, dependence on cart as a bulk carrier of peasant production was not only greater but also more universal.

Thus, the number of carts did increase in the rice milling districts during the 1920's but it did not increase at a rate faster than that of the non-mill districts at that time. Furthermore, the rise in the number of carts in the districts having no rice mills was more uniform in nature. Again, when the number of carts declined in the non-mill districts, it also declined in the rice milling ones, although the number of mills still continued to grow. Bankura and Birbhum were two typical districts, where rice milling was the only

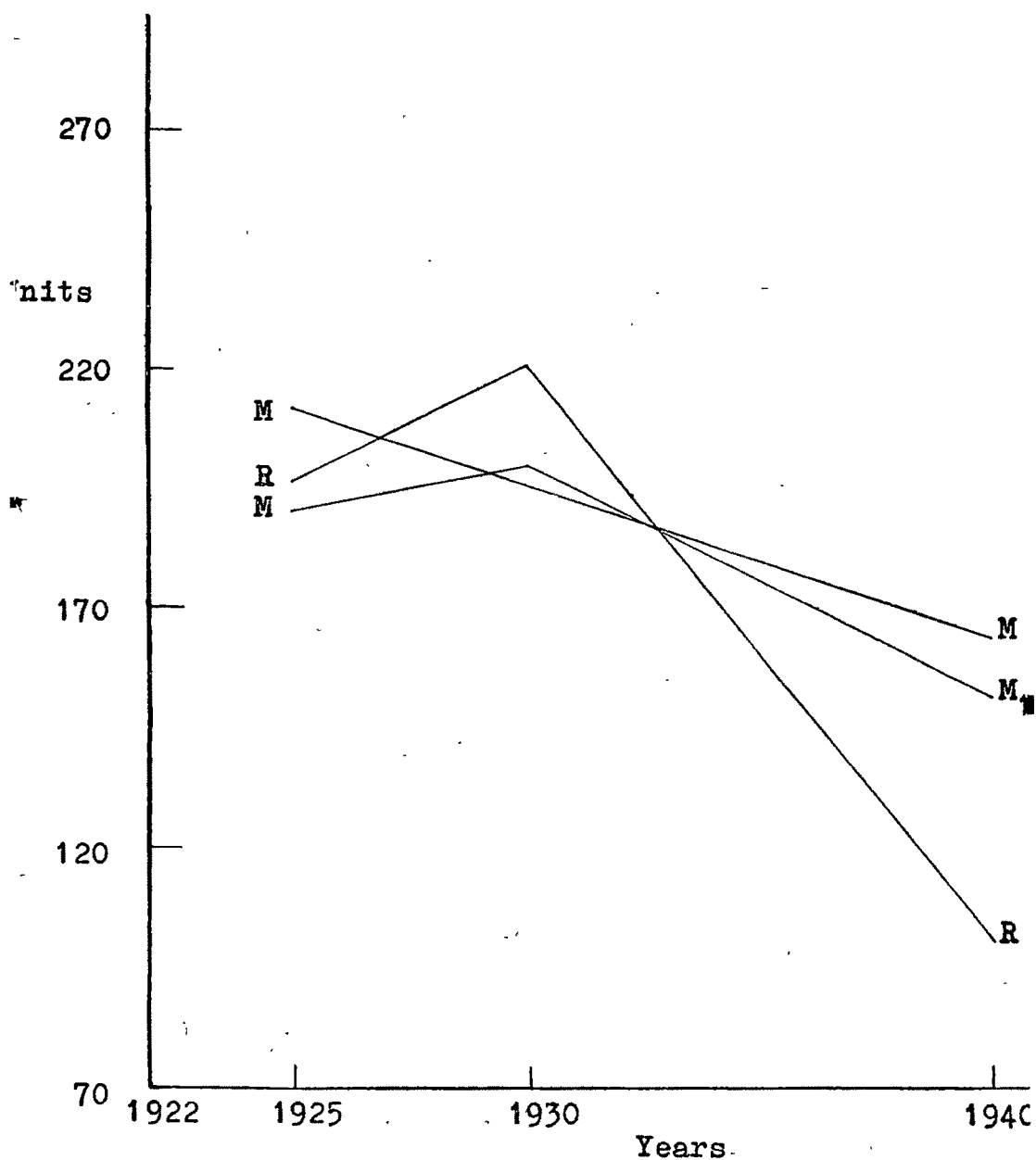


Graph : I Rice Milling Districts / Carts.

MM : Midnapore.

BB : Burdwan.

BB₁ : Birbhum.



Graph : II Non-mill Districts / Carts.

RR : Rangpur.

MM : Murshidabad.

MM₁ : Malda.

important non-conventional industry till the end of our period. The degree of dependence on bullock cart as a means of primary transport was also perhaps the greatest in this region. However, *Table : V* shows a growth of 23 per cent and merely one per cent in the number of carts of Bankura and Birbhum between 1921 and 1931 compared to the 700 per cent and 960 per cent increase respectively in the number of their rice mills during a slightly different time frame (1921-1935). It may thus be inferred that the rice milling industry in Bengal did not have any expansionary impact on the existing system of primary transport.

Does it mean, under such circumstances, that the existing pool of carts in the districts in *Table : V* was already large and that the growth of the rice mills only led to a better utilization of the fleet ?

In 1921, Birbhum had 3·67 bullocks per cart and 2·2 bullocks per plough, when the district had only five rice mills. These rates for Bankura, having only two mills in that year, were 4·27 and 1·87 respectively. Owing to their greater dependence on the bullock cart, these districts, therefore, had quite a large number of carts in proportion to their cattle strength. Burdwan, having 22 mills in 1921, had 3·78 bullocks per cart. Similarly, the non-mill district of Murshidabad had 4·07 bullocks per cart in the same year. The picture was quite different with the remaining rice mill districts, which were relatively less dependent on carts. More significantly, bullock and cart ratio did not decrease very much since 1921 in most of the districts in *Table : V*.

It seems, therefore, plausible, that rice mills only led to a better utilization of the existing carts. The fact that the cost of carting nearly accounted for ten per cent of the sale price of the harvest paddy, as noted earlier, indicates the existence of a very strong demand for carts at the harvesting time, particularly in the districts of Birbhum, Bankura, Burdwan and Hooghly. The numerous references to cart-hiring also suggest the increasing demand for carts. A cultivator having a cart of his own and a command over those of his fellow villagers thus could easily pose as a petty-intermediary trader supplying the products of his village either to the mill or to the *aratdar*.⁸⁹¹

Why then did the increased demand for cart not lead to increased cart making in these districts ?

In most of the districts the existing fleet of carts in 1921 was quite large in proportion to their cattle strength. More important was the bullock and plough ratio of these districts, which was only 2.07 bullocks per plough in 1921 on an average. Under such a situation, a new cart for the peasant would also mean a fresh pair of bullocks, which, without the necessary support of any additional land to till, only involved a cost too high to be compensated by cart-hiring. For instance, in the early 1930's the average price of a pair of bullocks in Bolpur was Rs. 40. The total annual maintenance cost of the same, including depreciation, was estimated by S. Bose at Rs. 58, when the price of paddy was Rs. 1.5 per maund. Bose also stated that in the Bolpur region a pair of bullocks could cultivate five acres of land.⁸⁸²

Thus the number of bullocks would increase only in the context of an increasing acreage and productivity of land, since a peasant would buy an additional pair of bullocks only when the availability of enough land would justify the input. Since the growth of the rice milling industry scarcely contributed to the growth of rice cultivation or to increased yield per acre, the increased demand for cart failed to encourage cart-making activity to any significant extent. Above all, the additional demand for cart, created by rice mills, was only a seasonal one. It used to rise in the harvest season, when cultivators started supplying paddy to mills, and declined immediately after the harvesting was over. The difference in the freight rates between the two cases of cart-hiring, as cited above, indicates such a trend. One case (Hooghly) related to the hiring of a cart by a peasant or a combination of peasants during the harvest time. The other (Bankura) referred to the engagement of carts by the *aratdar* for carrying paddy from his *arat* to the railway station or to the mill, which was a post-harvest activity. The Hooghly rate was 50 per cent higher than the freight rate in Bankura.

On the whole, the growth of the rice milling industry in Bengal did not have much of an impact on the existing modes of primary transport. The similar nature of the increase in the number of carts both in the rice milling and the non-mill districts in the 1920's (vide

Graphs I and II) indicates that whatever increase in the number of carts occurred was not due to the mill activity but due to certain other economic factors, an analysis of which lies beyond the purview of this study. That the number of carts uniformly declined in all the districts in *Table V* and *Table VI* only strengthens such an argument. However, rice mills created an opportunity for a better utilization of the existing fleet of carts. But that too was also ephemeral in nature. That sugar mills of Gorakhpur did lead to an altogether different result was primarily because of the changes that it brought about in the sugarcane cultivation in the region. The bulkier nature of the crop and the necessity of transporting sugarcane to the mill immediately after the harvest to prevent deterioration of its sucrose content had also a role to play in this.

IV : 3 Rice Mill and the System of Marketing : Paddy/Rice.

In the pre-mill period the system of marketing paddy in Bengal was relatively a simple one. In those days, the usual practice was for the cultivator to sell paddy in the form of rice. The Collector of Jessore thus described the system :

“In the case of paddy, the cultivators generally make rice and sell to the local traders, who usually bring the produce to the *hats* and sell there to the consumers. In the larger bazars there are bigger merchants, who keep a large stock and sell direct to the consumers.”⁸⁸⁸

It was only when the cultivator had a surplus stock, too large to be husked by members of his family, that he made an outright sale of paddy. The marginal cultivator also sold paddy to meet his urgent cash requirements. In general the cultivating peasant always preferred sale of rice to sale of paddy, since sale of rice increased his income per maund of rice sold and he also came to have the bran and the husk, which he used both as fuel and an important supplement to his cattle feed.

Large quantities of paddy were, however, sold by the various landed groups—*Zamindars*, *Jotedars* and other tenure holders. Paddy was sold either directly to the village merchant or brought to the village *hats*. Here intermediary traders, engaged in paddy-husking business, viz, the *baniwalah*, *Kistiwalah* and also the *paikar*, made

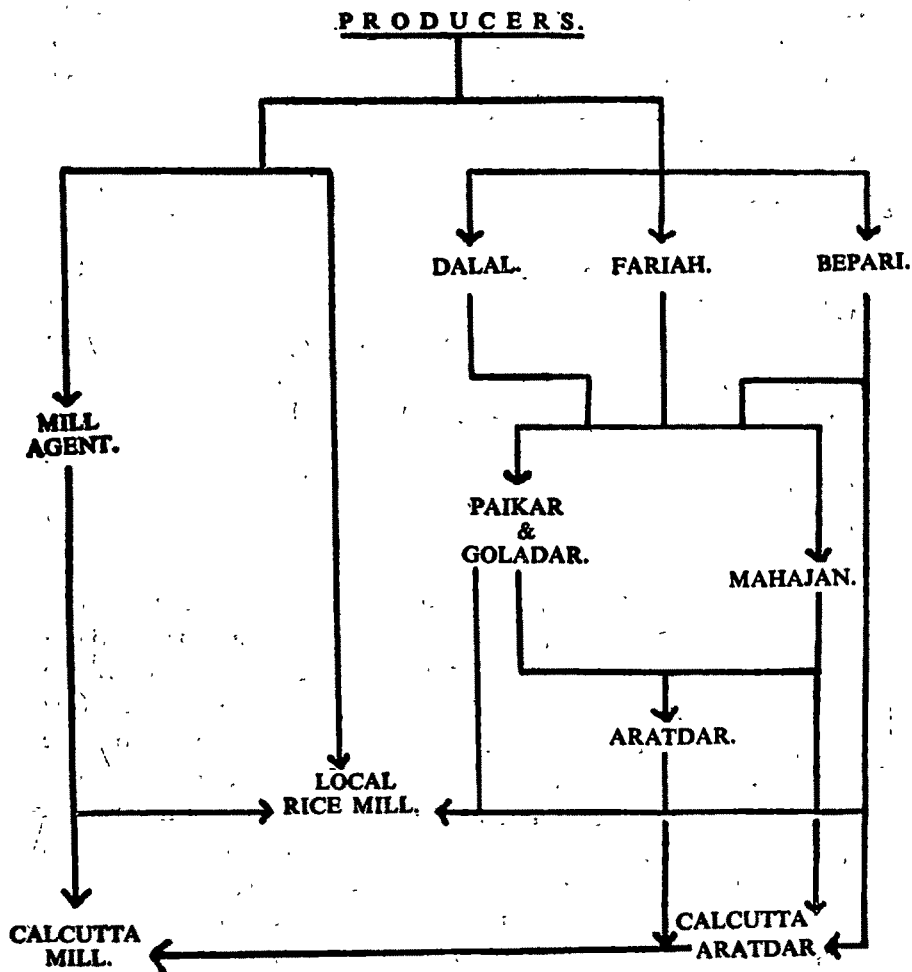
their purchases usually directly from the cultivator and also from the village merchant. These itinerant traders then got the paddy husked by professional huskers in the way we have described earlier. The finished rice was then sold to the mofussil *mahajan-aratdar* located at important trade centres or to their collecting agents. These merchants on their part, sent the stock to Calcutta or to other important centres of trade and also catered to the needs of retail sale in their own areas.

One noticeable feature of this system was the relative smallness of the number of intermediaries and the comparatively unorganized character of the trade at the primary levels. In most cases the village merchant was a moneylender-cum-trader and thus in a position to influence the marketable flow of paddy of the village through his paddy or cash loans advanced during the lean season. Another important characteristic of the traditional system of paddy marketing in Bengal was the close alliance between intermediary traders and professional huskers. The traditional system of rice trade was to a great extent dependent on moneylender's credit to traders.

The rice mill had considerably broadened the base of this marketing organization by bringing in a larger number of intermediaries at the primary level.⁸⁸⁴ To the existing class of village intermediaries, such as the *faria* and the *bepari*, was added a new class of agents called *dalals*, buying paddy on behalf of rice mills.⁸⁸⁵ As the primary markets became more and more competitive with the spread of rice milling activities in the districts, every one having a stake in procuring large supplies of paddy sent his men to the village. Thus, there were mill agents, primary traders working for the secondary merchants like *paikars* and *goladars*, primary traders working as agents of the *mahajan* and the *aratdar*, procuring paddy for some distant mills, and a host of other traders operating on their own. The rice mill, therefore, had brought about multiple and more complex trade relations in the system of marketing paddy. The following diagram shows the different channels of paddy transit from the producer to the rice mill.

"The *pharias* are men who go about from village to village and buy paddy in small quantities from the growers and sell to the

DIAGRAM SHOWING THE MOVEMENT OF PADDY
FROM THE PRODUCER TO THE RICE MILL.



bigger *pharias* or *mahajans*", wrote the Collector of Rajsahi in 1926.⁸⁸⁶ In the pre-mill days the *faria* generally borrowed from moneylenders. The merchant getting regular supplies from *farias* also financed their trade. Thus in 1903-04, the *aratdars* of Ramkrishnapur in Howrah were stated to have been making *dadans* to the *kistiwala beparis* of Howrah and Hooghly.⁸⁸⁷ In the rice milling districts, the *farias* now started working as the agent of the

mill. Mr. H. Quinton, the District Officer of Birbhum, provides a classic description of the arrangement for paddy supply to the rice mills in the district :

“There are about 25 large mills in the district. Most of the paddy grown finds its way to these mills. Either producers or buyers bring the paddy in carts to mills. Buyers are either (1) agents of the mill owners called *farias*, who are financed by the mill owners on contract or commission system or (2) *aratdars*, who buy the paddy with their own capital from producers, stock it and sell to mill owners at a profit.”²⁸⁸

The agency system spread also to those districts, where there were no mills but which supplied paddy in bulk to the mills of the neighbouring districts. In those areas the *pharia* acted as the agent of the merchant supplying paddy to the mill. For instance, in Bagura,

“the Marwari and local Bengali merchants make purchases from cultivating raiyats through commissioned agents, locally known as *farias*, who are paid commission at the rate of one anna per maund. These small traders sell their stock at a profit say 2 to 4 annas per maund to the mill owners of Hilli.”²⁸⁹

The *faria* and the *bepari* generally denoted more or less a similar class of primary traders. In Hooghly, “*Bepari* goes from village to village and brings the produce to the mills or to the *arat*”,²⁹⁰ like their counterparts in the 24-Parganas.²⁹¹ In some districts, as Faridpur and Murshidabad, *beparis* denoted a separate group of traders occupying a higher position in the trading network than *farias*.²⁹²

Thus there had been a large expansion of opportunities in paddy dealing for primary traders, such as *farias*, *beparis* and *dalals*. Every one interested in the trade, the miller, the *mahajan*, the *aratdar* etc, valued them for their intimate knowledge of the village and was prepared to provide funds. One significant result of the growing competition at the primary levels of trade and of the increased flow of credit was to weaken the existing control of the village moneylender-cum-trader over the marketing of paddy in the village, particularly in the rice milling districts. With the greater availability of cheaper credit it was now possible even for

some of the village cultivators to turn into middlemen after the harvesting was over.³⁹³

As a result of these changes, primary traders considerably increased their influences. For instance in Bolpur, in the 1930's *farias* started giving *dadans* to cultivators, presumably with funds provided by the mill, and in this way obliged them to hand over their crop at a lower price.³⁹⁴ The rate of their profit in the mid-1920's was, on an average, two annas per maund of paddy.³⁹⁵ Want of necessary data makes it difficult for us to investigate the question of the subsequent changes in their financial position, when the primary markets of paddy tended to be more competitive. The nature of the primary trade in paddy was perhaps best illustrated by S. Bose in his study on the marketing of rice at Bolpur.

"The *pharia* takes little risk. He buys paddy and clean rice from the cultivator and makes profit usually by dishonest means. His profits are not large, but as one *pharia* handles a large quantity, even a small margin per maund gives him a fair income."³⁹⁶

The coming of rice mills had similarly enlarged the opportunities at the higher levels of intermediary trade in paddy. The *aratdar*, *goladar* and *mahajan* now controlled an increased volume of trade as they combined their existing rice trade with that of paddy. In some areas they now began to work as commission agents, procuring paddy through their own network, either for the local mill or for the metropolitan one via *mahajans* and the Calcutta *aratdar*.³⁹⁷ In the rice-milling districts of 24-Parganas, Burdwan and Howrah, *aratdars* received their funds from rice mills and charged a commission of three annas per maund for their services.³⁹⁸ The rice mills of Howrah and the 24-Parganas also bought paddy on credit from *aratdars* possessing large godowns, usually when the supply from other sources ceased.³⁹⁹ A similar arrangement of paddy supply to the mill also existed in Bolpur, which had twenty-one large *arats* in the early 1930's.⁴⁰⁰

Rice mills, therefore, had different arrangements for paddy supply ranging from the simpler system of direct dealing to the more complicated three or four-tier supply links, integrating the services of primary intermediaries, secondary merchants, *mahajans* and

aratdars into one network. The Calcutta mills usually procured paddy through this nexus,⁴⁰¹ like some of the mills in Midnapore and Howrah.⁴⁰² Similarly in Dinajpur, paddy used to pass from producers to rice mills via three different groups of middlemen, viz. *paikars*, *mahajans* and *aratdars*. However, the system most widely followed by the district mill was to get their supplies from primary traders via *mahajans* or *aratdars*.⁴⁰³ Rice mills often had their supplies through different arrangements in different seasons and not unusually in the same season. This they did to get the best of their supplies.

Compared to paddy procurement, supply of finished rice from the mill to the ultimate consumer was relatively a simple process. The rice mill directly sold rice to the retailer in the local market.⁴⁰⁴ Sometimes, the local *aratdar* or the *mahajan* intervened in the process, buying rice from the mill and selling it either to the retail trader, or to the Calcutta *aratdar*, or to the outside dealer in bulk.⁴⁰⁵ We have a detailed description of such transactions by the Bolpur *mahajan* in the 1930's :

"The *mahajans* have large supplies of cash, and the rice milled at all the mills pass through them. They are intermediaries between the mill and the outside broker, who visits the Bolpur market as occasion arises, and who does not do business with the mill direct, but goes to the *mahajan* specifying the quantity required, the quality and the price. The *mahajan* would take the order and would buy the necessary grain from the mills on cash payment. He would have to pay for the cart hire from the mill to the station and will book to the destination. The railway receipt will be sent to the broker at the destination by value-payable post ; and the broker, when he receives the railway receipt, pays the entire amount plus railway freight."⁴⁰⁶

In a number of cases, however, mill-owners themselves exported rice to out-station traders without the help of any middlemen. The rice mill also acted as a supplier to the Government.⁴⁰⁷

In brief, the rice milling industry had considerably increased the number of intermediary traders at the primary level, had diversified the existing channels of marketing paddy from the producer to the milling stage, and greatly increased the flow of credit in the entire

business. The rice mills were thus overwhelmingly dependent on intermediary traders for the bulk of their paddy supply.

In the Gorakhpur and Basti districts of U. P. in the 1930's *zamindars* compelled their tenants to grow sugarcane but forcibly removed the *kolhus* of those who wanted to press their own cane in order to ensure the supply of the contracted quantity of cane to the mill.⁴⁰⁸ In Bengal districts, however, the metropolitan or mofussil mills did not ever try to impose any kind of control on production or marketing of paddy in collaboration with the dominant village classes— *zamindars* and village moneylenders. We have stated above that rice mills had access only to a small portion of the total amount of paddy produced in Bengal. Some paddy was still husked in the traditional way. The forcible elimination of *dhenki*, even if it were possible here, would not have ensured a greater flow of paddy to the rice mill, because of the introduction of small husking units in villages. From the closing years of the period under study the increasing number of such units, their presence in close proximity to the peasant's home and the declining processing cost per unit posed a serious problem to the industry.

Above all, unlike sugarcane, paddy could be transported to a greater distance, stored for a longer time and was much less bulkier. Therefore, any attempt on the part of the rice mill to organize paddy supply through the *zamindar* or village moneylender would have only strengthened the position of these dominant village classes vis-a-vis the mofussil and metropolitan mills. Under such circumstances, *zamindars* and moneylenders would have utilized their control over the village to collect the surplus produce and would have sold the crop not only to the highest bidder but also at the time most favourable to them, much to the disadvantage of the miller. This explains why the Gorakhpur-type cartel of the dominant village classes and the mill owners did not come into existence in Bengal.

In fact, rice mills could hope to have the best of their supplies not through consolidation of the existing control of the dominant village classes over the marketable flow of paddy, but by ensuring that the village could be exposed to market forces. That was why rice mills had pressed into service a larger number of intermediary

traders at the primary level, providing funds to them and offering *dadans* to cultivators. The clash of interests of the miller and the local *zamindar* precluded the formation of such a cartel. The *Birbhum Barta* (13 August 1919) refers to one such feud between a Bolpur miller and the local *zamindar*.

"*Mysterious murder in Bolpur* : a 16-year boy, found to be drunk while working in a rice mill, was rebuked by the miller and was asked to refund the advance taken by him. The boy having absconded, his brother filed a suit saying that the boy has been beaten to death and has been thrown into the boiler. This has now proved to be incorrect. Due to some quarrel between the local landlord and the mill owner, the former encouraged the person to file a false suit."⁴⁰⁹

In reality, where the miller was an outsider, conflicts with the local *zamindar* were more frequent. Similarly, by increasing the flow of credit the rice mill had greatly reduced the role of the moneylender in this important branch of trade. In the rice milling districts in 1926, there was only a lone case of rice traders accepting credit from moneylenders. It relates to Birbhum, where the industry had just begun in 1926.⁴¹⁰ The same source, however, does not refer to moneylenders giving credit to paddy-dealing intermediaries in districts like 24-Parganas, Burdwan, Midnapore and Howrah. It is not proper to argue on the basis of this evidence alone that the rice mill had completely replaced the traditional credit system in the paddy/rice trade in these districts. However, it is quite true that by 1926 the rice milling industry had greatly reduced the role of usurious moneylending in this important branch of trade in this region. In Bankura, where the industry had developed later than in Birbhum, *mahajans*, and their procuring agents exporting paddy to Calcutta were financed by the Calcutta firms.⁴¹¹

However, weakening of this control of the dominant village classes over the marketable paddy of the village generally did not result in a better price deal to the peasant, as we have discussed earlier. The main reason is that the paddy producers were now subjected to a more organized control of intermediary traders. The increasing number of intermediaries meant a wider gap between the price at which the actual producer sold his crop and that at which

the ultimate consumer bought. The elimination of the middlemen and the organization of Co-operative Sale Societies of peasants were often suggested as a panacea of this evil.⁴¹² Even the rice mill would have benefited from the creation of peasants' sale societies. The available evidence, however, suggests that attempts to organize similar societies often failed due to the manipulation of intermediary traders.

A Co-operative Paddy Sale Society was registered in 1929 at Bolpur with the purpose of selling paddy directly to the mill. Its aim was to ensure a fair price and fair weight. It had subscribed Rs. 1,500 by selling 300 shares of Rs. 5 each, bought grain from the members on a cash basis and held it till the price rose a little. In this way a small profit was made. But the capital was hardly sufficient.

"Again cultivators had very little faith in the society. The *pharias* offered higher prices than the society, because the society always gave fair weights whereas the *farias* did not. The cultivators did not see through this and preferred to go to the *pharia* than become a member and sell through the Society. This was the reason why the Paddy Sale Society was a failure."⁴¹³

Thus the rice mill and the intermediary trader were mutually dependent on each other. This close interdependence was partly due to the origins of a number of millers from their involvement in rice trade. Such millers now utilized their established network of trade for the collection of paddy. The overwhelming dependence of millers on intermediary traders restricted their role largely to rice milling. This kind of dependence, therefore, reduced the profit margin of the miller. For instance, the Bolpur miller in the 1930's, on an average, earned from three to eight annas per maund of paddy husked. "In consideration of the large establishment of a factory and the capital invested, the miller's margin can not be considered excessive. He has also to bear all the risk of price fluctuations as he is unable to hold back his produce for want of capital and storage facilities."⁴¹⁴ The dependence of the rice mill on intermediary traders, therefore, created problem in the long run, particularly for small miller, who could not combine rice milling with intermediary trade in rice, for want of the required capital.

This explains why small millers eventually failed to remain in the business and either leased or sold out their mills to rice mill giants having widespread intermediary network in paddy/rice trade in the province.

The net result of all these was a more efficient, comparatively more centralized and greatly increased pulls on the local supplies of paddy, thus reducing its availability in the village. This was a development of immense significance. The traditional system of rice processing, being time consuming and largely performed in rural areas, used to discourage the outflow of paddy from the village. The rice mill by revolutionizing and localizing the processing work had removed this earlier constraint on paddy outflow. On the other hand, an expanding demand for paddy supported by the penetration of big money in the paddy trade, in the overall context of a static acreage and yield rate during the period under study,⁴¹⁵ created conditions, where most of the available surplus was siphoned out of the village immediately after the harvest.

The way the rice mill had encouraged the outflow of paddy in Birbhum had been deplored by the editor of the local weekly, *Birbhum Barta*, as early as in 1919.

“দেখিতে দেখিতে বীরভূম জেলায় আজকাল ৫০টি চালের মল হইয়াছে। এই সকল মলের মধ্যে সকলগুলি ১২ মাস চলে না। অধিকাংশ মলই প্রায় ৬ মাস বন্ধ থাকে। ... এই সকল মলে যে চাল প্রস্তুত হয় তাহা এখানে চলে না, বিদেশে রপ্তানী হইয়া যায়। বীরভূমের ন্যায় একটি ক্ষুদ্র জেলায় এত অধিক মল হওয়ায় মলের মালিকগণেরও যেমন অসুবিধা হইয়াছে, আবার প্রত্যহ সহস্র সহস্র মণ চাউল এখান হইতে চলিয়া যাওয়ায় স্থানীয় গরীব অধিবাসীগণেরও তেমন অসুবিধা হইতেছে। হুজুগে মাতিয়া জেলায় এতগুলি মল না আনা হলে কাহারও এত অসুবিধা হইত না।”⁴¹⁶

(Gradually the district of Birbhum has come to possess nearly 50 rice mills (including hullers). All of these mills do not run all the year round. Most of them remain closed for nearly six months. The rice that is produced by these mills does not have any local demand and is exported to other countries. The existence of so many mills in a small district like Birbhum has caused difficulties both to millers and to the people at large. The poor people of Birbhum are adversely affected by the daily export of thousands of maunds of rice from this district. It seems none would have suffered had so many mills not been established in haste.)

Thus Bolpur having eighteen rice mills in 1930 exported a quantity of rice (7,94,524 maunds), which was higher than what the entire district of Birbhum had exported in 1876-77 (7,83,500 maunds), when there were no rice mills in the district.⁴¹⁷ The extent of paddy cultivation had only marginally increased during the period from 1876-77 to 1930, and the yield rate nearly stagnated.⁴¹⁸

What the editor of *Birbhum Barta* wrote about the district of Birbhum happened also in other rice-milling districts. The popular attitude to the rice mills in the event of a scarcity could be best illustrated by the following incident of a popular protest in 1942 against a Midnapore mill.

"On September 8, 1942, nearly 2000 to 3000 demonstrators under the Congress banner marched on a rice mill at Danipur village in Mahisadal police station in Midnapore. There was a large stocks of rice in the mill awaiting shipment out of the district. The crowd demanded through its leaders that no shipment be made. A detachment of five armed policemen, who had been sent to guard the mill, refused to be intimidated or panicked, opening fire they killed three demonstrators and wounded others. The crowd dispresed..."⁴¹⁹

V. Conclusion

The rice mill, therefore, did not improve the quality of the final product⁴²⁰ and had the same 'recovery rate' as hand-pounding.⁴²¹ The industry also did not have any expansionary impact on other sectors of the economy. Above all, it led to large-scale rural unemployment. The rice mill also impoverished the cattle by depriving it of an important supplement to its food i.e., the paddy husk.⁴²² The anonymous author of an article entitled *Chaler Kal* in the *Birbhum Barta* thus wisely stated as early as in 1921: "We have got enough of rice mills in the district. These actually do not add to the prosperity of the country..."⁴²³

The process of deindustrialization has so far been widely studied mainly with regard to hand-loom weaving. It is rather surprising that the displacement of a very large number of professional huskers in our villages, caused by the rice-milling industry in a slightly different

time frame, has largely escaped our attention. The mechanization of paddy-processing has even been often regarded as a mark of industrial advancement and progress.⁴²⁴

Professor N. K. Sinha concluded that by 1828 the ruin of the old cotton industry resulted in the unemployment of about a million persons; including cotton weavers, cotton growers, spinners, dressers, embroiderers and others.⁴²⁵ Bengal, in 1828, also included Bihar and Orissa. Sinha did not precisely state the number of persons affected in Bengal proper. More recently, Dr. Awwal, on the basis of the census figures, estimated that between 1901 and 1931 the weaving population of Bengal had a net decrease of 13,905 persons excluding cotton spinners and sizers.⁴²⁶ On the other hand, the annual loss of full-time employment in the traditional hand-pounding industry as a result of rice mills alone had increased from 11,305 in 1916 to 1,01,745 in 1931 or by 800 per cent, (Vide *Table IV* above). If we take into account the number of huskers affected by rice hullers, the aggregate loss of employment in the traditional hand-pounding industry must have been still greater. From our rough estimates it appears that the loss of this employment in the rural sector was much larger than the creation of employment in the rice-milling industry. It was, in fact, even greater than the employment created in the province by jute mills and rice mills taken together.

The nature of the employment thus lost was even more important. In the traditional village society, paddy-dehusking was primarily a women's job. In most cases these women represented the weakest section of the village society. To deprive them of their traditional occupation, which they had been following for long,⁴²⁷ was simply to ruin their means of livelihood. In reality, however, it was much more than that.

The professional husker not only pounded paddy for others. She also prepared *chira* (dried rice) and *muri* (fried rice) from the quantity of paddy, which she had received as *bani* (wage), using the husk as her fuel. The loss of their work also meant the end of specific benefits they had enjoyed for long in the form of perquisites that the village always offered them for their service.⁴²⁸ By appropriating to themselves nearly the entire value added by this important food industry to their staple crop, rice mills also reduced

the aggregate purchasing power of the village. Because, rice mills' returns to the village, either in the form of wages, enhanced prices for the crop, intermediary incomes at the primary level of trade or increased business to carters were utterly insignificant in comparison to the total loss of village incomes due to the shifting of this important processing work from village homes to mill houses.⁴²⁸

It is thus reasonable to argue that the rice milling industry led to increased destitution of the village. A good number of the poor and destitute village women were thus forced to swell the rank of agricultural labourers. An increase in the number of female weavers in Bengal, (24.39 per cent between 1901 and 1931)⁴²⁹ might indicate a change over of the affected village women from hand-pounding to cotton spinning and sizing.

To indicate the severity of the destitution, caused by the Bengal famine of 1943, Greenough in his recent study of the famine, has prepared an index on the basis of an ISI^{430a} sample survey of 386 villages in 1944-45. In this index paddy-husking having 79 points has been ranked in the third category, next to fishing (223) and agricultural labourer (89).⁴³⁰ Thus huskers suffered more destitution than many other occupational groups in the village,^{430a} not only because of the termination of market relation during the famine but also because they had been suffering for long from a progressively decreasing volume of their business as a result of rice mills and hullers. The economic viability of the huskers as a professional group, therefore, was already threatened by the increasing mechanization of rice processing.

It is only towards the end of our period, with the social restrictions and taboos yielding to more objective economic needs, that this unskilled women labour could come out of their villages as vendors of vegetables or of similar other items of cheaper variety in the sub-urban areas. The distance from their villages to the areas they served gradually increased with the increasing availability of better transport. An investigation into this field would reveal that destitute women coming regularly from villages with cheaper wares to vend in towns was an entirely new development of recent origins. In fact, their number tended to rise. The increasing urbanization

also attracted a large number of them to leave their villages to join the domestic service in the cities and towns.

As early as 1907, a lone voice from the government, G. N. Gupta, had warned against the increasing craze for mechanizing indiscriminately this important processing industry of the state and had urged the appropriate authority to restrict such industrial activities within the Calcutta areas to support the then existing export trade in rice.⁴³¹ Unfortunately, that voice of wisdom was ignored and the government stood a mute witness to this ill-conceived growth of an industry with practically no expansionary impact on the other sectors of the economy.

That the government's perception of the problem was totally different would be evident from what Mr. Holland in his capacity as the Chairman of the Indian Industrial Commission (1916-1918), had stated with regard to the development of the rice milling industry. No one would regret, he said, the change from hand-pounding to mechanical milling of rice for social and economic reasons. He further added : "The relief of women from these household burdens is a step in advance and leaves them in leisure, which they may in the future devote either to more cultured domestic occupation or to more productive work."⁴³²

The public attitude to rice mills did not undergo any change even in the later years. Thus the Bengal Government had all through encouraged the growth of this industry in this province in various ways.⁴³³ The same policy continued even after 1947, although the machine-milling of rice in a country like ours has been decried by a number of policy-making bodies as well as by international opinions.⁴³⁴

The encouraging impact of an advanced technique on the traditional industry of hand loom weaving, ⁴³⁵ thus failed to initiate similar attempts to improve the efficiency of hand-pounding and thereby to make it more competitive with machine-milling of rice.⁴³⁶ An attempt to achieve a workable balance between the traditional sector and the mill sector would perhaps have been more appropriate to the context of our national development.

Unlike the hand-loom weaving the traditional industry of rice de-husking did not suffer from foreign competition. Nor did it fail just because of the technological development in rice processing. For, the traditional industry showed signs of considerable vitality throughout the greater part of our period. A market survey of 1955 thus revealed that the consumers' preference both in rural areas and among the poorer sections of the urban population was for hand-pounded rice, provided that was available in the market at a reasonable price.⁴⁸⁷ By that time, however, a handful of organized capitalists had largely succeeded in driving out the hand-pounded rice from the market by flooding it with the cheaper milled rice.⁴⁸⁸

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. (i) *The Report of the Rice Milling Committee*, 1955. (New Delhi, 1955) Government of India Publication. P. 22. (Hereafter RMC). (ii) N. Chakraborty, *A Design for Development of Village Industries*, (Calcutta, 1959) pp. 156-157, 259-260.
2. B. Bandyopadhyay, *Sangbad Patre Sekaler Katha*, (Calcutta, 1356 B.Y.) Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. Vol-I (1818-1830) p. 186.
3. Blair B. Kling, 'Economic Foundation of the Bengal Renaissance' in R. V. Baumer (Ed.) *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, (Honolulu, 1976) p. 30.
4. Anonymous, 'Dhan Bhana Kal' in *Mahajanbandhu* (A monthly journal for the traders published in Bengali) Vol-III, No: 2, 1310 B. Y., p. 31. (Hereafter MB).
5. S. Amin has pointed out the existence of similar prejudice against the machine made sugar and the sugar mill in U.P. S. Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India*, (Delhi, 1984) p. 101.
6. *Rarhi* i.e. rice produced in the South-Western Bengal. *Purbi* i.e. rice produced in Eastern Bengal. Anonymous, 'Ramkrishnapure Chauler Kaj' in MB, Vol-IV, No. 3, 1311 B. Y.
7. 'Dhan Bhana Kal' MB, Vol-III, No. 2, 1310 B.Y. p. 32.
8. S. Sastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj*, (Calcutta, 1903) Reprint, 1983, p. 32.
9. H. H. Ghosh, 'Rice Manufacture' in *Report of the Indian Industrial Conference*, 1906. (Calcutta, 1906). pp. 97-98.
10. O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer, Howrah*, (Calcutta, 1909) p. 114.
11. H. H. Ghosh, *Op. cit.* pp. 97-98.

12. *Huller* : The huller is a mechanical mill, which does both de-husking and polishing in one operation. The huller machinery is a very simple one.
13. B. Bandyopadhyay, *Op. cit.*, Vol-I, p 186.
14. C. Mukherji, *Urban Growth in A Rural Area*, (Visva Bharati, 1972) Appendix—I, p. 252.
15. *Sheller-type Mills* : These are bigger and automatic mills, performing de-husking and polishing separately. The cleaning, de-husking, winnowing, polishing and sieving are done automatically in a sequence and the various products such as rice, husk, bran etc. are separately delivered. These mills have a greater production capacity than the hullers.
16. B. P. Adarkar, *Report on the Labour Conditions in the Rice Mills*, (Delhi, 1946) p. 28.
17. K. L. Datta, *Report on the Enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India*, (Calcutta, 1915) Vol-1, p. 4.
18. *Report of the Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-1918*, (Calcutta, 1918) Vol-I, p. 162.
19. *Census, 1921*, Vol-V, Part-I, pp. 408-409.
20. B. P. Adarkar, *Op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.
21. *Ibid.* p. 28.
22. (i) *The Report of the Bengal Industrial Survey Committee, 1948*, (Calcutta, 1948) p. 22 (Hereafter *BISC*). (ii) B. P. Adarkar, *Op. cit.*, p. 28.
23. (i) S. K. Haldar, *Report on the Family Budget Enquiry into the Living Conditions of the Rice Mill Workers in West Bengal : 1949-50*, (Calcutta, 1952) p. 1. (Hereafter *FBERMW*). (ii) *RMC*, p. 145.
24. Anonymous, 'Arambage Chaler Kal Paridarshan' in *Arthik Unnati*, Vol-IV, No. 10, *Magh*, 1336. B. Y.
25. (i) S. N. Seth, *Bange Chaltatta*, (Calcutta, 1332 B.Y.) pp. 375-376. (ii) O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer, Howrah*, (Calcutta, 1909) p. 114.
26. S.N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 352.
27. (i). N Chakraborty, *Op. cit.*, p. 154. (ii) S.K. Haldar, *FBERMW*, p. 1.
28. *RMC*, p. 145.
29. *Ibid.* p. 24.
30. N. Chakraborty, *Op. cit.*, p. 158.
31. *Report on the Growth of the Joint Stock Companies in Bengal*, (Calcutta, 1937), p. 31.
32. H. A. Ali, *The Rice Industry in Lower Birbhum : A Survey*, (Visva Bharati Rural Studies, 1931) p. 38.
33. *RMC*, p. 14.

34. D. Ray, *Food Administration in Eastern India : 1939-1954*, (Visva Bharati, 1958) pp. 152-153.
35. *Report of the Bengal Rice Mills Association for the year 1948*, cited by D. Ray, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.
36. *Report of the Bengal Rice Mills Association for the years 1944 and 1945*, cited by D. Ray, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.
37. D. Ray, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
38. *Ibid*, p. 42.
39. *Ibid*. p. 31.
40. I. Ray, 'Problems of Modern Rice Mills in West Bengal' in *Seminar on Modernisation and Utilisation of By-products of Rice Milling Industry*, 2 April, 1988. (Calcutta, 1988) Bengal Rice Mills Association, p. 76.
41. *Report of the Bengal Rice Mills Association for the year 1946*, (Calcutta, 1946) Bengal Rice Mills Association, Appendix—B.
42. M. M. Islam, *Bengal Agriculture : 1920-1946*, (New Delhi, 1978), p. 58.
43. *Report of the Minimum Wages Advisory Committee for Rice Mills in West Bengal*, (Calcutta, 1957) pp. 3-4. (Hereafter MWAC).
44. *Ibid*. p. 4.
45. The number of mills in Calcutta and its adjacent areas fell from 105 in 1946 to only 5 at present. Out of these five mills again three were closed in 1988. I. Ray, *Op. cit.*, p. 75.
46. Table : II.
47. MWAC, p. 4.
48. *Report on the Internal Trade of Bengal for the year : 1876-77*, p. 24.
49. *Ibid*, p. 25.
50. *Ibid*, 1882-83, p. 71.
51. (i) *Ibid*, 1876-77, p. 24, (ii) *Ibid*, 1877-78, p. 9.
52. (i) *Ibid*, Relevant years. (ii) S. Mukherji, *Trade in Rice and Jute in Bengal : Its Effects on Prices, Cultivation and Composition of the two crops in early 20th. century, 1900/01 to 1920/21* (Unpublished thesis, Deptt. of Economics, Jadavpur University, MSS) Calcutta, 1971, p. 115.
53. (i) N. Mukherji, 'Foreign and Inland Trade, 1883-1905', in N. K. Sinha, (Ed.) *The History of Bengal (1757-1905)*, (Calcutta, 1967) p. 349. (ii) K. L. Datta, *Op. cit.*, Vol-I, p. 112.
54. *Marketing of Agricultural Produce in Bengal*, (Calcutta, 1926) J. R. Blair, Esq, I.C.S. to the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Bengal, 15 Dec, 1926. p. 24. (Hereafter MAP).
55. *Report on the Internal Trade of Bengal, 1876-77*, p. 24.
56. (i) *Capital*, 26 Feb, 1889, p. 373. (ii) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 376.

57. R. C. Majumdar, (Ed.), *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Part-I, (Bombay, 1963) p. 836.
58. Almost all the contemporary newspapers published from Calcutta were critical of the export of rice. *Report on the Newspapers and Periodicals in Bengal*, April, 1912 to March, 1922.
59. (i) *Report of the Rice Trade Enquiry Committee, Burma*, (Calcutta, 1937) pp. 18, 26-27. (ii) In Germany, for instance, large mills arose on the river and sea ports in the second half of the nineteenth century to grind imported corn. Similar developments were also noticeable in Italy. C. M. Cipolla, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, (Glasgow, 1980) Vol-4 (1) pp. 133, 299.
60. (i) B. P. Adarkar, *Op. cit.*, p. 28. (ii) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 64-70.
61. Ramkristopur (Howrah), Chetla, Tolleyganj, Belehata-Ultadanga (Calcutta)
62. B. P. Adarkar, *Op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.
63. *Report of the Bengal Paddy and Rice Enquiry Committee*, (Calcutta, 1938) p. 34. (Hereunder described as *BPREC*).
64. (i) *BPREC*, pp. 18-21. (ii) N. C. Chakraborty, *The Problem of Bengal's Rice Supply*, (Calcutta, 1939) p. 29.
65. B. B. Chaudhuri, 'Agrarian Relations in Bengal, 1859-1885', in N. K. Sinha (Ed.) *Op. cit.*, p. 249.
66. *MB*, Vol-III, No. 2, 1310, B.Y., p. 31.
67. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.
68. (i) *BPREC*, p. 13, (ii) *RMC*, p.59, (iii) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.
69. *MAP*, p. 19.
70. (i) *MAP*, pp. 18-19, (ii) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.
71. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.
72. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 148.
73. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.
74. B. P. Adarkar, *Op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.
75. *BPREC*, p. 24.
76. S. C. Mitter, *The Rice Milling Industry*, (Calcutta, 1928) Deptt. of Industries, Bulletin No. 33, pp. 3, 8-10.
77. Most of the industries in Bengal were located in the three leading industrial zones of Kanchrapara-Calcutta-Budge Budge, Hooghly-Howrah and Asansol-Raniganj. *Census*, 1951, Vol-VI, Part-IA, pp. 112-113.
78. (i) *BPREC*, p. 13, (ii) *BISC*, p. 201, (iii) *FBERMW*, p. 1.
79. *Census*, 1951, Vol-VI, Part-IA, p. 113.
80. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 119.

81. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.
82. *Census*, 1921, Vol-V, Part-I, pp. 408-409.
83. *MAP*, pp. 18-19.
84. O' Malley, *Op. cit.*, *Rajsahi*, (Calcutta, 1916), p. 105.
85. *Census*, 1921, *Op. cit.*, pp. 408-409.
86. B. Banerji, *Industrial Profile of the Calcutta Metropolitan District*, (Calcutta, 1967) p. 154.
87. (i) S. C. Mitter, *Op. cit.*, pp. 8-10. (ii) N. C. Chakraborty, *A Design*, etc *Op. cit.*, pp. 159-161.
88. (i) *BPREC*, p. 23. (ii) N. C. Chakraborty, *The Problem of Bengal's Rice etc.* *Op. cit.*, p. 35.
89. (i) *BISC*, p. 202, (ii) S. A. Deshpande, *The Rice Milling Industry in Vidarbha*. (Nagpur, ?) p. 224. (iii) These districts largely retained their surplus character even at the end of our period. For the respective position of different districts in terms of consumption requirement and net production of rice see *Census*, 1951, Vol-VI, Part-IA, Statement, IV, 31, and D. Ray, *Op. cit.*, Table : 4. 10, p. 89.
90. *BPREC*, p. 23.
91. (i) *BPREC*, p. 23. (ii) N. C. Chakraborty, *The Problem etc.* *Op. cit.*, p. 35.
92. (i) *BPREC*, p. 23, (ii) N. C. Chakraborty, *The Problem etc.* *Op. cit.*, p. 35.
93. *BPREC*, p. 13.
94. *BISC*, p. 202.
95. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 282, 352.
96. *Statement of Industrial Labour for 1901-1905*, (Calcutta, 1907) pp. 1-18.
97. *Census*, 1921, *Op. cit.*, pp. 408-409.
98. AZM I-u-Awwal, *The Industrial Development of Bengal, 1900-1939*, (New Delhi, 1982) p. 153.
99. (i) N. C. Chakraborty, *The Problem etc.* *Op. cit.*, p. 35. (ii) *BISC*, p. 23.
100. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 94-95, 236, 284.
101. B. Sarkar, 'An Interview with the Owner of a Steamer Company,' in *Arthik Unnati*, Vol-II, Part 10.
102. *BPREC*, p. 14.
103. *BISC*, p. 212.
104. *BPREC*, p. 14.
105. In Dacca, for instance, there were as many as 47 jute presses, Mymensingh had 33, Pabna had 28, Rangpur 19, whereas the 24-Parganas and Howrah had only 24 in total, during the period of 1901-1905. *Statement of Industrial Labour* *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-18. and *BISC*, pp. 199-200 for the later period.

106. *BPREC*, pp. 79-81.
107. *MAP*, pp. 18-19, 24-25, 36-39.
108. *Report of the Rice Trade Enquiry Committee (Burma)*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 18, 32, 35, 64-70, 71.
109. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, pp. 254-256.
110. *MWAC*, p. 4.
111. (i) H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, pp. 41-42. (ii) S. A. Deshpande, *Op. cit.* p. 226, also see C. Mukherji, and N. Chakraborty, *A Design*, etc. on the point. *Op. cit.*
112. S. Bose, 'Marketing of Rice at Bolpur', in *Sankhya : The Indian Journal of Statistics*, Vol-II, Part-II, 1936. (Reprint by Visva Bharati, ?), p. 6.
113. *Ibid* p. 7.
114. *Ibid*. p. 6.
115. *RMC*, p. 12.
116. *Census 1921*, *Op. cit.* pp. 408-409.
117. *FBERMW*. p. 5.
118.

<i>Designation.</i>	<i>Nature of Duties.</i>
<i>Tindal</i>	He is responsible for the proper functioning of the engine. He keeps the engine clean and uses lubricants and oil when required.
<i>Hullerman</i>	He is in charge of the Husking machine and Fan. He looks carefully that no rice is broken nor any paddy comes out un-husked. He accordingly adjusts the machine when required.
<i>Fireman</i>	He feeds the boiler with husk.
<i>Huskman</i>	He prepares the fuel and supply them to the fireman for use in the boiler. He also cleans the boiler.
<i>Huller-Cooly</i>	He feeds the husking machine with dried paddy stacked nearby. He also feeds the fanning machine with husked rice. He also carries the finished rice to the Godown.
<i>Chatal Coolies</i>	They are usually women, who spread the boiled paddy on the open floor for sun-drying and then stacked it to the huller.
119. S. A. Deshpande, *Op. cit.*, p. 226.
120. In a big rice mill only the *Tindal*, *Fireman*, *Huskman*, *Darwan* and a few clerks were usually appointed on a permanent basis. *FBERMW*, p. 6.
121. *FBERMW*, pp. 8-9.
122. S. A. Deshpande, *Op. cit.*, p. 226.
123. *FBERMW*, pp. 3, 6.

124. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 379-396.
125. *Census*, 1921, *Op. cit.*, pp. 408-409.
126. *Census*, 1911, Vol-I, Part-I, (Calcutta, 1913) p. 446.
127. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 379-396.
128. (i) 'Arambage Chaler Kal' etc. *Op. cit.*, (ii) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, (iii) S. C. Mitter, *Op. cit.*, p. 5.
129. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, pp. 150, 254.
130. (i) C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, pp. 254, 289. (ii) In the Sahapur area of the 24-Parganas one of the rice mill owners was a medical practitioner. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 385.
131. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, pp. 288-289.
132. (i) List of the Rice Mills in Bengal in S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 379-396. (ii) *Classified List of Factories in Bengal, (Corrected up to 1939)*, (Calcutta, 1939), Govt. of Bengal. See under the Rice Mills. (Hereafter *CLFB*).
133. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 380.
134. *CLFB*.
135. (i) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 379-396. (ii) *CLFB*.
136. *CLFB*.
137. (i) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 379-396. (ii) *CLFB*.
138. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, pp. 254, 289, 300.
139. (i) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 379-396. (ii) *CLFB*.
140. D & A Thorner, *Land and Labour in India*, (Bombay, 1965) p. 77.
141. *Census*, 1901. Vol-VI, Part-I, p. 476.
142. *Census*, 1921. p. 408.
143. *Census*, 1901. p. 469.
144. *Census*, 1921. pp. 408-409.
145. *Report on the Marketing of Rice in India, 1951*. (New Delhi, 1951), Govt. of India Publication. p. 164. (Hereafter *MRI*.)
146. *Report on the Internal Trade* etc. *Op. cit.*, 1876-77, p. 22.
147. *Ibid.* p. 24.
148. (i) *Ibid.* p. 25. (ii) *Bengal District Gazetteer*: O' Malley, *Midnapore*, (Calcutta, 1911) p. 128; *Khulna* (Calcutta, 1908) p. 29; F. W. Strong, *Dinajpur*, (Allahabad, 1912) p. 83; J. N. Gupta, *Bogra*, (Calcutta, 1910) p. 100; J. C. Jack, *Bakarganj*, (Calcutta, 1918) pp. 81-82. (iii) H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 38. (iv) C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, pp. 251-252.
149. 'Dhan Bhana Kal' *Op. cit.*
150. 'Ramkrishtapure Chaler Kaj' *Op. cit.* p. 59.

151. (i) W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, (Delhi, 1979), Vol-VIII pp. 411-412. (ii) G. E. Lambourn, *Bengal District Gazetteer, Malda*, (Calcutta, 1918) p. 65. (iii) F. W. Strong, *Op. cit.* p. 79.
152. (i) W. W. Hunter, *Op. cit.*, pp. 411-412. (ii) F. W. Strong, *Op. cit.* p. 83.
153. F. W. Strong, *Op. cit.*, p. 79.
154. G. E. Lambourn, *Op. cit.* p. 65.
155. *MAP*, Appendix, Howrah, pp. 74-75.
156. *Ibid*, Appendix, Birbhum, pp. 70-71.
157. *Ibid*, p. 79.
158. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.* p. 38.
159. *Ibid*, p. 41.
160. *Ibid*, p. 38.
161. *Report of the Village and Small Industries Committee*, 1955, (New Delhi, 1955) Govt. of India Publication, p. 46. (Hereafter *VSIC*).
162. (i) *RMC*, p. 10. (ii) *VSIC*, p. 46.
163. *RMC*, p. 10.
164. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 46.
165. *Ibid*, p. 43.
166. (i) *Ibid*, pp. 41-43. (ii) *VSIC*, p. 46. (iii) *RMC*, p. 10.
167. *FBERMW*, p. 4.
168. *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.
169. *RMC*, p. 20.
170. *Ibid*, p. 22.
171. *VSIC*, p. 46.
172. 'Arambage Chaler Kal' etc. *Op. cit.*
173. S. A. Deshpande, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.
174. *RMC*, p. 145.
175. 'Arambage Chaler Kal' etc. *Op. cit.*
176. (i) O' Malley, *Howrah Op. cit.*, p. 114. (ii) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 375-376. (iii) N. Chakraborty, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.
177. N. Chakraborty, *Op. cit.*, p. 149.
178. *RMC*, pp. 57, 145.
179. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 376.
180. *RMC*, p. 145.
181. For instance in 1970, Burdwan had as many as 760 small husking machines against 129 rice mills. *District Hand Book on Agricultural Marketing, Burdwan District*, (Calcutta, 1970) p. 46. (Hereafter *DHBAM*).

182. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.
183. (i) *RMC*, pp. 22-23, 60. (ii) D. Roy, 'Prospects of Hand-Pounding of Rice in East India', in *The Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Jan-March, 1960, Vol-XV, No. 1, p. 82.
184. N. Chakraborty, *Op. cit.*, pp. 148-150.
185. *RMC*, p. 22.
186. D. Roy, 'Prospects of Hand pounding' etc. *Op. cit.*, p. 82.
187. *RMC*, p. 145.
188. N. Chakraborty, *Op. cit.*, p. 149.
189. *RMC*, p. 10.
190. *MRI*, p. 164.
191. AZM I-u-Awwal, *Op. cit.*, pp. 241-242.
192. *Ibid.* pp. 240-242.
193. B. Banerji, *Op. cit.*, p. 49.
194. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.
195. 'Visva Bharati Rural Studies No. 1' cited by H. A. Ali, *Ibid.* p. 42.
196. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.
197. *RMC*, p. 10.
198. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, pp. 40-43.
199. *FBERMW*, pp. 3-6
200. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.
201. K. B. Saha, *Economics of Rural Bengal*, (Calcutta, 1930) pp. 184-185.
202. *FBERMW*, p. 6.
203. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 41.
204. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 184.
205. (i) *Report on the Internal Trade, 1876-77*, *Op. cit.*, p. 25. (ii) W. W. Hunter, *Op. cit.*, Vol-VIII, *Dinajpur*, p. 413, Vol-II, *Jessore*, p. 303, Vol-III, *Hooghly*, p. 376. (iii) F. W. Strong, *Op. cit.*, p. 83. (iv) J. N. Gupta, *Op. cit.* p. 108.
206. O' Malley, *Midnapore*, *Op. cit.*, p. 128.
207. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 261-265.
208. 'Ramkrishtapure Chauler Kaj' etc *Op. cit.*, pp. 57-59.
- 209 (i) S. Sastri, *Op. cit.*, p. 32. (ii) J. C. Jack, *Bakarganj*, *Op. cit.*, p. 82. (iii) *MAP*, pp. 18-39, 57-60, Appendix, A. (iv) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 405-406. (v) *Report on the Operation of the Director of Civil Supplies, Bengal, 1918-1920*, (Calcutta, 1920) p. 21. (vi) P. Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920-1947. The Land Question*, (Calcutta, 1984) p. 148.
210. O' Malley, *Khulna*, *Op. cit.*

211. *MAP*, p. 36.
212. *BISC*, p. 23.
213. *MAP*, pp. 18-19, 19-24.
214. 'Ramkrishnapure Chauler Kaj' etc. *Op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.
215. (i) *BISC*, p. 23. (ii) *BPREC*, p. 18. (iii) C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 258.
216. (i) *BISC*, p. 23. (ii) C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 258.
217. F. W. Strong, *Op. cit.*, p. 83.
218. S. Mukherji, 'Unpublished thesis' etc. *Op. cit.*, p. 9. (ii) F. W. Strong, *Op. cit.*, p. 83.
219. J. N. Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp. 100, 107-108.
220. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.
221. *MAP*, pp. 18-19.
222. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 230, 375-376.
223. *BPREC*, p. 49.
224. *RMC*, pp. 13-14.
225. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 119.
226. *BPREC*, p. 23.
227. *MAP*, pp. 18-20.
228. *Ibid.* p. 28.
229. *BISC*, p. 23.
230. *DHBAM*, *Burdwan*, *Op. cit.*, p. 37.
231. *BISC*, p. 23.
232. *MAP*, pp. 19-20.
233. *Ibid.* pp. 23-24.
234. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 230, 375-376.
235. C. Mukherji, 'Productivity and Profitability of rice milling industry in Birbhum' in *Khadigramodyog*, Dec., 1966. also see *Urban Growth* etc. *Op. cit.*, pp. 119, 148-152.
236. Anonymous, 'Chaler Kal' in *Birbhum Barta* (Suri, ?) Reproduced in B. Sarkar's *Arthik Unnati*, Vol-IV, Aswin, 1336, B. Y.
237. (i) *MAP*, p. 28. (ii) *DHABM*, *Birbhum* (Calcutta, 1963) pp. 14-15.
238. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, pp. 152, 258.
239. *MAP*, p. 63.
240. *Ibid.* pp. 56-57.
241. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 266.
242. *MAP*, pp. 19-20, 70-71.
243. *Ibid.* pp. 70-71.

244. *Ibid.* pp. 18-19.
245. S. Mukherji, 'Imperialism in Action through a Mercantilist Function (A Case Study of the Rural Impoverishment in Early 20th Century Bengal as indicated by Decline in per-capita Consumption of Food-grains) in *Essays in Honour of Prof. S. C. Sarkar*, (New Delhi, 1976) PPH, p. 748.
246. Though it started late, the industry had a significant growth here within a short period of time, *Vide, Table-II.*
247. *BPREC*, pp. 19, 110.
248. *Vide Table : II.*
249. *Report on the Seaborne Trade and Navigation, Burma*, 1940. (Calcutta, 1940) pp. 64-71. Also see *Report of the Rice Trade etc. Op. cit.*
250. (i) J. C. Jack, *Bakarganj, Op. cit.*, pp. 80-82. (ii) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 236, 290-291. (iii) *MAP*, pp. 36, 82-83, 87-99. (iv) *BISC*, pp. 22-23. (v) S. Mukherji, 'Unpublished Thesis' etc. pp. 120, 123.
251. *MAP*, p. 57.
252. (i) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 248, 266. (ii) *MAP*, pp. 38-39, 56-58, 59-60.
253. *MAP*, pp. 59-60.
254. *Ibid*, p. 64.
255. *Ibid*, pp. 70-71.
256. *Ibid*, p. 30.
257. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 49.
258. *MAP*, pp. 70-71.
259. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 352.
260. *Ibid.*
261. *MAP*, p. 16.
262. *Ibid*, pp. 18-19.
263. *DHBAM, Midnapore*, (Calcutta, 1966) p. 41.
264. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.
265. *MAP*, pp. 20-22.
266. (i) *DHABM, Midnapore, Op. cit.*, p. 35. (ii) *DHABM, Birbhum*, (Calcutta, 1963) p. 14. (iii) *MAP*, pp. 70-71. (iv) C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 152.
267. 'Ramkrishtapure Chauler Kaj', etc. *Op. cit.*
268. *MAP*, p. 36.
269. *Ibid*, p. 50.
270. *Ibid*, pp. 20-21.
271. (i) *Ibid*, pp. 17-30. (ii) *RMC*, p. 26.

272. *MAP*, pp. 17-18, 20-21, 30, 39, 50, 58.
273. *Ibid*, pp. 17-18.
274. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, pp. 6-7. (ii) H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.
275. *MAP*, p. 39.
276. *Ibid*, p. 44.
277. *Ibid*, pp. 36, 47-48.
278. *Ibid*, pp. 55, 59-60, 63.
279. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 255.
280. (i) *MAP*, p. 30. (ii) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 47-50.
281. *The Hindusthan*, Calcutta, 4 March, 1922. *RNP*.
282. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 42.
283. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 255.
284. C. Mukherji, 'Productivity and Profitability etc.' *Op. cit.*
285. *Hindusthan Standard*, 21 Aug. 1964, cited by C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 250.
286. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 251.
287. *Ibid*, Appendix-I.
- 287 (a). *Infra*,
288. *RMC*, p. 58.
289. Vide *Table : II*.
290. *MAP*, p. 57.
291. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 152.
292. *DHBAM, Birbhum, Op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.
293. Under this system a consignment was sent to any outside market for delivery to the consignor, who sends his agent to that particular place with the railway receipt. The representative of the mill found out a purchaser and sold the Railway receipt (including other incidental costs). The purchaser took delivery of the consignment after the Rly. Receipt was endorsed by the representative of the consignor on receipt of payment. *DHBAM, Birbhum, Op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.
294. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 207.
295. *Ibid*, p. 300.
296. *Ibid*, p. 254.
297. *Ibid*, p. 256.
298. *Ibid*, p. 150.
299. *Ibid*, p. 149.
300. The new business started by them included mainly cloth-selling, hardware shops, and transport operations. *Ibid*. p. 207.

301. *Ibid.* p. 255.
302. (i) Out of 289 rice mills listed in S. N. Seth's *Bange Chaltatta*, (1925) only 27 (or 9.34%) were Marwari mills. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, pp. 379-392. (ii) In 1935, the number of Marwari mills increased to 52 out of the total 402 rice mills in Bengal i.e. a share of only 13%. Since this estimate is based on the list of the rice mills and the name of their owners, it does not indicate, however, leasing out of the mill and the transfer of financial control to other resourceful traders. *CLFB*, See under rice mills.
303. *MWAC*, p. 4.
304. *Ibid.* p. 4.
305. G. Blyn, *Agricultural Trends in India, 1891-1947*, (Philadelphia, 1966) p. 98.
306. M. M. Islam, *Op. cit.*, p. 85.
307. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-83.
308. In the western districts of Bengal paddy cultivation had long been the most common market activity. (i) P. R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal, The Famine of 1943-1944*, (Oxford, 1982), OUP, p. 80. (ii) P. Chatterjee, *Op. cit.*, p. 148.
309. *Report on the Operation of the Director of Civil Supplies, Bengal, 1918-1920*, (Calcutta, 1920) p. 22.
310. (i) S. Mukherji, Unpublished thesis etc. *Op. cit.*, pp. 268-269. (ii) A.K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939*. (New Delhi, 1975) Reprint, 1980, pp. 268-269. (iii) M. M. Islam, *Op. cit.*, p. 81.
311. A. K. Bagchi, *Op. cit.*, pp. 11, 96, 103, 111.
312. (i) R. K. Roy, *Industrialization in India: Growth and Conflict in the Private Corporate Sector, 1914-1947*, (Delhi, 1979) p. 140. (ii) A. K. Bagchi, *Op. cit.*, p. 111.
313. S. Amin, *Op. cit.*, p. 114.
314. *Modernization and Utilization* etc. *Op. cit.*
315. S. Mukherji, *Unpublished thesis*, etc. *Op. cit.*, p. 163.
316. G. Blyn, *Op. cit.*, p. 158.
317. O. H. K. Spate, *India and Pakistan: A General and Regional Geography*, (London, 1954) p. 527.
318. M. M. Islam, *Op. cit.*, pp. 80-82.
319. (i) *MAP*, p. 22. (ii) H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.
320. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 11.
321. *MAP*, P. 63.
322. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 11.
323. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

324. *MAP*, p. 24.
325. *MAP*, p. 70.
326. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.
327. *RMC*,
328. *MAP*, p. 23.
329. S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.
330. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, pp. 5, 11.
331. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 152, Foot note, 13.
332. *MAP*, p. 16.
333. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, pp. 12, 15.
334. *MAP*, pp. 22-24.
335. *Ibid.* p. 32.
336. *Ibid.* Appendix, Burdwan.
337. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 6. (ii) H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 39.
338. *MAP*, p. 19.
339. *Ibid.* p. 22.
340. *Ibid.* p. 16.
341. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, pp. 11.-12.
342. *Ibid.* p. 12.
343. *MAP*, p. 17.
344. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 11.
345. *Ibid.* p. 15.
346. *Ibid.* pp. 6-7.
347. (i) *MAP*, p. 22. (ii) H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.
348. (i) In 1926, the system was widely prevalent in the Sadar sub-division of Hooghly. *MAP*, p. 23. (ii) The direct dealing between the cultivators and rice mill increased during the control period, when the middleman's trade in paddy was considerably restricted. A rough estimate of the relative importance of the different agencies supplying paddy to rice mills in Burdwan, as prepared by the Burdwan District Rice Mill Owners' Association, reveals that direct dealing had increased by 25% between 1935 to 1953. The same estimate also suggests an increasing trend during the period after decontrol. The development of roads had an important contribution to this result. D. Ray, *Food Administration*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 142-143. (iii) In 1970, however, the direct purchase by mills from the cultivators in the district of Burdwan, accounted for only 10% of the total mill intake. But, in some other districts, e.g. Midnapore and Birbhum, it was more widely practised by the rice mills.

- DHBAM, Burdwan, Op. cit.*, p. 37,; *Midnapore, Op. cit.*, p. 35,; *Birbhum, Op. cit.*, p. 14.
349. *MAP*, p. 25.
350. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.
351. (i) *DHBAM, Midnapore, Op. cit.*, p. 41. (ii) C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 152, Foot note, 13.
352. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.
353. *Ibid*, p. 4.
354. *Ibid*, pp. 2-5.
355. *MAP*, p. 20.
356. *Ibid*, p. 22.
357. *Average Prices of Staple Food Crop (Rice) in Bengal, 1867 to 1934*. (Calcutta, 1935) Govt. of Bengal Publications, pp. 8-9.
358. This is based on the study of S. Bose on the marketing of rice in Bolpur. In 1933-34; the price of rice in Bolpur varied from Rs. 1'31 to Rs. 2'5 per maund. The harvest price of paddy in Bolpur in that year was Rs. 1'5 per maund, which was just the half of the annual average price of rice (Rs. 3 per maund) in the Sadar sub-division of Birbhum in the same year. On this basis, the harvest price of paddy has been taken as the half of the annual average price of rice for rough estimation. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 4. and *Average Price of Staple Food Crop etc.*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.
359. *Average Price of Staple Food Crop, etc.*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.
360. *BPREC*, p. 81.
361. *MAP*, pp. 70-71.
362. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.
363. *DHBAM, Midnapore, Op. cit.*, p. 41.
364. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
365. *MAP*, p. 19.
366. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.
367. *Birbhum Barta*, 10 June, 1940.
368. *Ibid.*, 26 Nov 1955.
369. *DHBAM, Midnapore, Op. cit.*, p. 41.
370. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 152.
371. *MAP*, p. 30.
372. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.
373. *MAP*, p. 52.
374. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

375. 'Chaler Kal' *Op. cit.*,
376. *MAP*, p. 30.
377. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 42.
378. S. Amin, *Op. cit.*, p. 120.
379. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.
380. S. Amin, *Op. cit.*, pp. 158-162.
381. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.
382. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.
383. (i) *MAP*, pp. 35, 51. (ii) 'Bardhamane Chauler Kaj' in *MB*, Vol-IV, No. 5, *Ashar*, 1311 B.Y. p. 106. (iii) 'Ramkrishtapure Chauler Kaj' etc. *Op. cit.* (iv) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.
384. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.
385. (i) *MAP*, pp. 70-71. (ii) *DHBAM*, *Burdwan*, *Op. cit.*, p. 46, ; *Ibid*, *Birbhum*, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
386. *MAP*, p. 54.
387. 'Ramkrishtapure Chauler Kaj' etc. *Op. cit.*, p. 59.
388. *MAP*, p. 18.
389. *Ibid*, p. 63.
390. *Ibid*, p. 75.
391. *Ibid*, pp. 28, 45, 77.
392. *Ibid*, pp. 28, 45, Appendix.
393. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.
394. (i) S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 12. (ii) H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.
395. *MAP*, pp. 7-8, 63.
396. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
397. *Ibid*.
398. *MAP*, p. 77.
399. *Ibid*, p. 22.
400. (i) S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 8. (ii) H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 40.
401. (i) *MAP*, pp. 70-71, 72-73. (ii) *BPREC*, p. 50. (iii) *DHBAM*, *Birbhum*, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
402. *MAP*, Appendix, Midnapore, Howrah.
403. *Ibid*, pp. 70-75.
404. (i) *Ibid*, pp. 7-8. (ii) *DHBAM*, Midnapore, *Op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.
405. *DHBAM*, Midnapore, *Op. cit.*, p. 35, and *Ibid*, *Birbhum*, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
406. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.
407. *RMC*.

408. S. Amin, *Op. cit.*, p. 120.
409. *Birbhum Barta*, cited by C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 285.
410. *MAP*, pp. 70-71.
411. *Ibid*, Appendix, See in the relevant districts.
412. *Ibid*, p. 77.
413. S. Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.
414. *Ibid*, p. 15.
415. M. M. Islam, *Op. cit.*, See the corresponding Tables in the Appendix.
416. 'Chaler Kal' *Op. cit.*,
417. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, pp. 38, 41.
418. *Ibid.*, p. 42,
419. P. R. Greenough, *Op. cit.*, p. 95.
420. In fact, the rice mill actually undermined the nutritional contents of rice. Thus in a region like Bengal, where rice constituted the staple food of the people, it deprived the poor people of their cheap source of nutrition. For an elaborate discussion on the point see (i) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 377. (ii) 'Resolution of the League of Nations, Inter-Govt. Conference of Eastern Countries held in Bandung Java, 1937, in *RMC*, p. 5. (iii) Supplementary Note by Dr D. V. Karmakar to the report of the Rice Milling Committee, 1955, in *RMC*, Appendix—I. p. 50. (iv) *VSIC*, cited by S. A. Deshpande, *Op. cit.*, p. 21. (v) N. Chakraborty, *Op. cit.*, pp. 158-159. (vi) Central Food Research Institute, Mysore, *Some Facts About Rice*, (New Delhi, 1959) Govt. of India Publications, p. 4.
421. C. Mukherji, *Op. cit.*, p. 251.
422. H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.
423. 'Chaler Kal' *Op. cit.*,
424. (i) H. H. Ghosh, *Op. cit.*, pp. 93-99. (ii) *Report of the Indian Industrial Commission*, *Op. cit.* (iii) S. C. Mitter, *Op. cit.* (iv) K. B. Saha, *Op. cit.*, pp. 183-185.
425. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal, 1793-1848*, (Calcutta, 1970) Vol-III, p. 7.
426. AZM, I-u-Awwal, , *Op. cit.*, pp. 203-205.
427. D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, (Delhi, 1970) p. 150.
- 427 (a). For instance, they were allowed by the rich people to use as habitation a portion of their lands. Professional huskers also received from their clients, during the festive season, perquisites in the form of new cloths and sundry other articles.
428. This has been explained earlier. Also see H. A. Ali, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

429. AZM I-u-Awwal, *Op. cit.*, p. 205.
- 429 (a). Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta.
430. P. R. Greenough, *Op. cit.*, pp. 205-206, 211.
- 430 (a). The fishermen suffered mainly due to the Govt.'s boat-denial policy.
431. G. N. Gupta, *A Survey of Industries and Resources of Eastern Bengal and Assam for 1907-1908*, (Shillong, 1908) p. 75.
432. *Report of the Indian Industrial Commission*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 162-164.
433. The Bengal Govt. used to publish monographs and other bulletins supplying latest information on the industry. The Govt. also introduced cheaper varieties of rice-hullers and to make it popular proto-type of this huller was displayed in numerous railway stations of different districts. (i) S. C. Mitter, *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-12. (ii) *Arthik Unnati*, Vol-II, Part-VI, Aswin, 1334 B. Y. (iii) *Arthik Unnati*, Vol-VI, Part-IV, Sravan, 1338 B. Y.
434. (i) *VSIC*, pp. 46-47. (ii) *RMC*, p. 5. (iii) *Report of the First Session of International Rice Commission, March 1949* (Bangkok, 1949) pp. 7-8. (iv) *Report of the Rice Study Group*, FAO, UNO, Washington, USA, Trivandrum Meeting, 1947, pp. 32-37.
435. AZM I-u-Awwal, *Op. cit.*, p. 203.
436. In early twentieth century, attempts to improve the functional efficiency of the *Dhenki* in Assam had resulted in a five-fold increase of its yield per day. S. C. Dasgupta, *Report of the Rural and Cottage Industries Sub-Committee*. (New Delhi, 1939) p. 47.
437. *RMC*, p. 29.
438. (i) S. N. Seth, *Op. cit.*, p. 215. (ii) *RMC*, pp. 13-14, 27-29.

Abbreviations

RMC.	<i>Report of the Rice Milling Committee, 1955.</i>
MB.	<i>Mahajanbandhu.</i>
BISC.	<i>Report of the Bengal Industrial Survey Committee, 1948.</i>
FBERMW.	<i>Report on the Family Budget Enquiry into the Living Conditions of the Rice Mill Workers in West Bengal, 1949-1950.</i>
MWAC.	<i>Report of the Minimum Wages Advisory Committee for Rice Mills in West Bengal, 1957.</i>
MAP.	<i>Marketing of Agricultural Produce in Bengal, 1926.</i>
BPREC.	<i>Report of the Bengal Paddy and Rice Enquiry Committee, 1938.</i>
CLFB.	<i>Classified List of Factories in Bengal, 1939.</i>
MRI.	<i>Report on the Marketing of Rice in India, 1951.</i>
VSIC.	<i>Report of the Village and Small Industries Committee, 1955.</i>
DHBAM.	<i>District Hand Book on Agricultural Marketing.</i>
RNP.	<i>Report on the Newspapers and Periodicals in Bengal.</i>

ASIATIC STATES AND AGRARIAN ECONOMIES :
TRIBUTARY COMMERCIALISM IN SOUTH INDIA,

1650 - 1800

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For anyone who doubts that oriental despotism is snuggled happily in the embrace of economic history as a cherished model of early-modern empires outside Europe, I recommend E. L. Jones, *The European Miracle : Environments, economies, and geo-politics in the history of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge, 1981). A quote from Ernest Gellner adorns the final chapter : "Perhaps the absence of fundamental change calls for no special explanation and only the European miracle does." But Hegel and Marx needed a "special explanation," and so does Jones, who begins his summary account of three non-European empires as follows :

The Ottoman, Mughal, and Manchu systems were all alien, imposed military despotisms : revenue pumps. They were primarily responsible for the blighted developmental prospects of their subjects : prospects already dimmed independently of the colonialism, treaty ports, unequal trade agreements, and indemnities with which Europe was to beset them in the nineteenth century. [229]

Concerning Ottoman and Mughal empires, he begins by saying that they derived from "the turmoil of the steppes" caused by the Mongols ; so with a twelfth century quote (?) from Genghis Khan, he can leap into principles of Muslim empire through the eighteenth century, thus :

It is useful to remember their original motives, given here in the words of Genghis Khan : "The greatest pleasure is to vanquish your enemies and chase them before you, to rob them of their wealth and see those dear to them bathed in tears, to ride their horses and clasp to your bosom their wives and daughters' ... Did these leopards change their spots ? How did military plunder machines of that sort comport themselves as the central organising principle of large-scale peasant economies ? [230]

The order at first imposed by a military conqueror may have released initial spurts of productivity in all these systems, but their nature required only a slight check or weak ruler to bring about intense competition for resources among the elite, enormous oppression, and a corresponding fall in investment. They dare not lose in war, yet could not coexist with peace because it tended to bring such population growth among the subject peoples. Beneath the elaborate ceremonial and display, the worm was already in the apple. [230]

Despite great creative surges in times when Europe had still been primitive, despotic Asian institutions suppressed creativity or diverted it into producing voluptuous luxuries. Palace revolutions were all their internal politics seemed to offer. [231]

Jones is to some extent a loose cannon. His book is tied down to scholarship by his own work on Europe. He uses good secondary work on China, by Mark Elvin and others. But on Ottoman economic history, he might have found better reading in a good college course and on Mughal India he uses W. H. Moreland [1923] rather than Irfan Habib [1963]. He thus does not lose his grip on Ottoman and Mughal history because of the obscurity and inadequacy of its scholarship (though Mughal and Ottoman history does seem to be more difficult for Europeanists to penetrate) and we can legitimately ask why a loose cannon blasts so wantonly at the Mughals and Ottomans.

We could answer by exploring the implications of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and related work. But having done so, we would be left with fact that specialists have not displaced oriental despotism as a model of early-modern political economy in Ottoman and Mughal worlds. They have advanced economic history with better understandings of trade, commodity circulation, and commercial capital accumulation; and political history with better understandings of imperial and local domination. But Jones does represent hegemonic ideas about the articulation of Asiatic states with "large-scale peasant economies." We still often hear early-modern states and empires outside Europe described in effect as "imposed military despotisms: revenue pumps," "military plunder machines," not only typified but even constituted by "elaborate ceremonial and display," "despotic Asian institutions [that] suppressed creativity

or diverted it into producing voluptuous luxuries," where "[p]alace revolutions were all ... internal politics [seem] to offer."

The tradition that Jones draws on for credibility has a long history. It imagines that Asiatic states are built on a foundation of self-sufficient agrarian production, from which rulers coerce taxes to finance their military power and luxury consumption, simulating commodity circulation from which states extort more taxes. Commercial capital is squeezed between the domineering, extortionate power of imperious protectors and sluggish agrarian economies, constantly robbed of surpluses and incentives for investment. Jones speculates that agrarian producers subsist in the face of constant crisis because they reproduce so fast that without crises they consume surpluses that might have been investment capital. If we take Malthusian speculation out of the picture, it corresponds with fair precision to a model of pre-colonial India that has survived a century since Marx's death.

Agrarian India entered our intellectual world in colonial policy debates. Opponents of the English East India Company's Bengal land revenue policy bolstered their case in London in the first decades of the nineteenth century with polemical representations of a village India that was harmonious, static, self-contained, and preyed upon by states from time immemorial. Decades later, Marx made these polemics intellectually durable. He saw that the necessity for Indian states to extort revenue from self-sufficient villages where the division of labor was frozen by religious caste prescription provided a key to India's Asiatic immobility. [Avineri] For Irfan Habib, a century later, the "revenue pump" provided a key to Mughal decline as well, for excess extraction triggered agrarian crisis. Village self-sufficiency made revenue a zero-sum game : when states took too much, village deficits threatened social reproduction ; crises and revolts ensued. [1963] Politicians, novelists, and social science have continually rediscovered the traditional and always threatened self-sufficiency of village India ; it lives today, like a miraculous ascetic, on thin air alone. Even admitting the evidence against it, Habib invoked it again recently [1985, 48] :

The entire centralised fiscal structure was inconceivable without extensive commodity circulation. This explained the

considerable development of commerce, banking and insurance, and growth of urban centers specialising in manufacture of commodities for distant markets ... But as far as we can see, Marx was right in stressing that it was by and large only the surplus which was converted into commodities, and the self-sufficiency of the peasant economy was not broken. The towns and their commerce were then entirely dependent on the system of state-enforced agrarian exploitation.

Habib is content with this rendering of the Mughal agrarian base because it provides *ceterus paribus* for an historical discourse that fixates on Mughal decline in relation to rising British power. Jones and Habib indicate major modern trajectories of this fixation ; Immanuel Wallerstein has now added another one, by tracing Mughal world-empire in decline and India's subsequent incorporation into the capitalist world-system. [See Wallerstein 1986 ; Palat et. al. ; Ludden Forthcoming 2] All see Mughal decline as caused by historical contradictions in the imperial system that undermine its economic foundation ; in such accounts, oriental despotism finds a happy niche.

New understandings of India in the Mughal era are coming from work that focuses not on Mughal power, integration, disintegration, and decline, but instead on peripheral regions, intermediary political formations, and regional foundations of empire in India's late pre-colonial political economy. This is in part a discursive maneuver by scholars trained in a time when regional histories have become more prominent in South Asian historical studies. But there is more to it. Mughal privilege in modern historiography derives from a colonial discourse that has used Mughal tradition and authority for its own purposes. [Cohn] This in itself helps to explain the vitality of oriental despotism. Intellectual efforts to move beyond colonial discourse and orientalism move historians away from a fixation on Mughal power and into research on human environments where imperial power had to be reproduced to survive. But even empirically speaking, if the Mughal order depends on its relation to an economic base, questions must arise about the nature of that relation and about the political economy that supported the Mughals ; when the mind moves in this direction, focusing on regions is imperative. Then we find that regions have histories that

interact with Mughal hegemony ; and Mughal imperium itself begins to crumble as a privileged object of scrutiny. Regional histories that construct the history of the empire lead into deeper histories of political economies that sustained the Mughals and their successors. [See Bayly ; Calkins ; Dirks : Leonard ; Ludden 1988 ; Perlin ; Richards ; Washbrook.]

From work on these lines have emerged challenging yet plausible reconstructions of the regional systems of power that developed in South Asia in the Mughal era. And it now seems that in many of these systems, commodity production increasingly served to articulate state power and agrarian political economies. Here I consider eighteenth century India as a whole and then details from Tirunelveli, a region in the far south, which was not embraced by Mughal authority until 1740, when the empire was fragmented and English power on the rise. My Tirunelveli data is from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century sources ; my most detailed source is a census from 1823. As I argue at length elsewhere, conditions evidenced in the 1823 census reflect those along the late eighteenth century Coromandel coast more generally and are the product of trends reaching back far beyond 1700. [Ludden 1985, 1988]

My argument is this. Rulers did coerce revenue from the economy and the population seems to expand in times of peace. But the scale and mechanisms of state extraction, population growth, and village social reproduction did not routinely squeeze out commercial capital accumulation and rob agrarian producers of investable surplus. State power, population growth and village reproduction all expanded during centuries after 1550 as they benefited from widespread, spatially differentiated trade expansion, commercial capital accumulation, labor specialization, and productive diversification. Key players in state revenue transactions played active commercial roles, but workers and investors at key places in the political economy produced increasingly commercialized economies that sustained early-modern states. At the base of these economies, village society did not typically reproduce itself in homeostatic self-sufficiency ; spatial differentiation of the rural landscape resulted from economic specialization that generated wealth for locally dominant classes and regional rulers alike.

Commodity Production and Early-Modern States

With evidence at our disposal, we can now begin to see that South Asia was slowly transformed by commodity production after 1550. But the colonial legacy obscures this history, for its statements about history, based on orientalist dichotomies between East and West, have achieved excess plausibility that turns contestable propositions into facts. One statement holds that the British conquered India in the aftermath of Mughal decline. This is contestable indeed. For changes wrought by commodity production in late pre-colonial India appear now to have enabled the British to achieve supremacy without themselves conquering India. Current research on these lines does not deny the reality of capitalist imperialism, British domination, or national liberation. It merely raises to a higher plane of significance than orientalism would allow the fact that colonial India was an elaborate structure of Anglo-Indian collaboration, based on alliances made in the eighteenth century and recast through the nineteenth. It improves histories of imperialism and nationalism to stress that Indians and Europeans allied with one another to raise capital, manpower, knowledge, material, and cultural sustenance for Company Raj. These allied forces became founders of colonial empire in India because in their (unorientalized) world, categorical oppositions did not separate the "Indian" and "European." Alliances formed and opposed one another for reasons that made sense in that world; and they fought for fruits of commercial capital.

That commercial capital could be so critical in late pre-colonial India's political economy seems implausible when excess plausibility attaches to statements about rural self-sufficiency. But by 1700, many villages in fact depended on urban demand. [Bayly 1983] Urban-rural, inter-village, inter-local, regional, and inter-regional trade and economic differentiation were important in medieval India [Banga; Champākalakshmi; Chattopadhyaya; Hall; Heitzman; Jain; Stein] and they expanded in scale and significance during the centuries of migration, agricultural expansion, technological diffusion, and war after 1300. [Ludden 1985; Mines; Raychaudhuri and Habib] Seventeenth century India contained many differentiated agrarian regions, some the size of European kingdoms, which generated state revenues in complex and often expansive networks of exchange, vital for local agrarian reproduction and state revenues alike.

Tributary commercialism, as I call it, typified and connected many regions of rapid growth by 1700. It depended on political authorities who contracted to pay revenue to superiors on the basis of collections from inferiors, and on contested but conventionalized hierarchies of political authority that ordered relations between capital cities and hinterland villages. These revenue transactions embody a form of the forward-contracting that pervaded whole regions but was particularly visible in long-distance trade. The forward contract became the transactional pivot of long-distance economic and political order, in which trust, loyalty, and status were critical and sustained by commercial capital.

Even when revenue relations appear bureaucratic, as in Mughal regions, political powers were patrimonial and the capacity to pay revenue rested on access to liquid assets—cash and credit in various forms, including kin and caste obligations. Land revenue, even when collected in kind, was made liquid and useful as state revenue through markets in agrarian commodities, including crops but also myriad village products, from baskets and iron to silk, cotton, salt, horses, and cattle. In these markets, major revenue collectors were major actors, but from village headman to zamindar and king their power survived in proportion to their ability to capture commercial capital in various revenue forms. They needed credit to span payment and collection. They needed secure if not expanding economic resources to tax, which meant large pay-outs for military and ritual, supported by investments in agriculture, manufacture, and trade.

The role of commercial capital was thus not limited to personal participation by merchants in politics. [Pearson] States depended on tribute, which depended on trade [Ludden 1988], while commercial investors depended on liquid capital protected and nourished by channels of tributary transactions. [Subrahmanyam] Commodity production did not dominate agriculture, but it was critical for reproduction and development in agrarian regions that were most important for states; and states took sustenance from taxation and speculative finance that depended on commodity production in agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and harvesting the forest.

This was the kind of political economy that European companies entered in commercially favoured localities on the coast. Near the

coast, regional agrarian economies had a large number of small-scale commercial domains that became involved in the worldwide operations of European merchant capital. Two-way dependency developed. Company exports and consumption depended on the inland political economy of tributary commercialism, which thrived on economic expansion fueled by overseas trade.

Through the early nineteenth century, overseas trade was most important for agrarian economies near the coast. But Arasaratnam [1986] cautions that in Coromandel trade to Southeast Asia outweighed Company trade before 1740, when both were a small fraction of inland commerce. Coastal regions of expanding commodity production benefited from long-distance demand, good crops, concentrations of skilled workers, and solid alliances among political and economic powers; and because all these conditions could change quickly, mobility for people and assets was the basic economic strategy, which limited accumulation while it increased flexibility. But long-lived centers of merchant capital accumulation did emerge around major company towns and the capital cities of inland states, all depending on commercial vitality in agrarian hinterlands. Cloth export regions—Coromandel, Bengal, and Gujarat, exporting overseas; and Punjab, exporting overland—probably depended most on the commercial integration of town and country. These major textile regions had five key attributes—inter-regional and foreign trade, an enterprising business class, sources of raw materials, ample labor supply, and secure agricultural surpluses [Chaudhuri, 240-53]—at least three of which depended on the involvement of agrarian economies with the export sector. [See also Om Prakash, 234-48.]

The vitality of coastal and other regions of expanding commodity production shaped the early-modern geography of economic opportunity and commercial power. The coast certainly increased its store of commercial assets more rapidly than the interior. In 1600, Bengal's major outlet for long-distance demand had been upper India, but "development of European trade with Bengal in the late seventeenth century had the effect of shifting the balance radically in favour of the seaborne trade." Europe became Bengal's chief trading partner and in the eighteenth century the textile industry "had not

only expanded to keep pace with the increased demand but had also fully adjusted its output to the special specifications required for selling in Europe." [Chaudhuri, 247]

Regional economic development helps to account for declining Mughal authority : as a weakening center asserted claims for tribute, regional powers found local sources of revenue finance with which to resist Mughal claims, strengthen regional power bases, and further weaken Mughal authority. [Calkins] The empire's agrarian crisis may have derived from prosperity more than decay, because prosperous regions could better finance revolt. [Alam 1986a.] Looking at sarkars Sambhal and Badaon, Awadh province, and Benares, Alam argues that "uprisings could be explained in terms of their growing strength and prosperity in relation to the Mughal center." [1986 b, 147]

Alliances that would build Company Raj formed in commercially advantaged regions on the fringes of Mughal authority and focused on Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. Regional struggles to build a post-Mughal hierarchy of political authority made the decision of men with commercial capital to invest critical. [Leonard ; Richards] In the south, Hyderabad and Mysore pursued contrary policies in the deadly game : the Nizam, first a French and then an English ally, secured European support and brought the most powerful army into the Company's wars ; Hyder Ali pursued military and financial centralization to seize fruits of commercial capital in his domain and oppose the Company. The Arcot Nawab, up to his ears in debt, used Mughal authority to raise armies and collect revenues for paying his creditors. Like the Nawab, Sultan and Nizam, lesser political actors with hands on diverse commercial resources made decisions about alliance and loyalty that set the course of colonial transitions. [Ludden 1985, 96-100]

The story of Mughal decline and British ascendancy could thus be told as a revolution inside tributary commercialism. During the years *circa* 1730-1790, Mughal decline made merchant capital, especially in regions of expanding commodity production, increasingly powerful. The most powerfully organized set of merchant capital interests drew its strength from empire at sea and regional alliances on the Mughal periphery. Company power increased (1730-1800) as

it exerted its coercive power in commercial relations [Arasaratnam] and usurped military functions from political allies that it subordinated to Company authority. As a ruling authority, (1790-1820) the Company redesigned transactions, hierarchies, and ideologies that comprised tributary commercialism, yet revealed its opportunistic conservatism as an agent of change, perhaps a characteristic of merchant capital in general. [Fox-Genovese and Genovese]

Tributary Commercialism in Tirunelveli

In Tirunelveli, a region south of Madurai in Tamil Nadu [Maps], major political and dominant caste territories built by the sixteenth century remain intact even today. But locally, the human landscape changes continually. In pursuit of livelihood, families move over the land and settle in localities that become more differentiated over time in caste composition, and by the labor of castes with specialized skills and distinct employment strategies, increasingly differentiated economically as well. This dynamic underlay the region's commercial vitality for two centuries before its colonial subjection in 1801.

State revenue transactions may have included speculative finance and forward contracting under late Nayakas of Madurai, before 1700 ; but we have little evidence of it. After 1740, when Mughal Nawabs of Arcot were in power, evidence of a trend in this direction becomes more plentiful. The family history of Uttumalai Raja shows that paying tribute became more critical under the Nawab, and even uses an Arabic word (*tOppA*) for "tribute" suggesting the innovation involved in such payments. [Dirks 1987, 92] English accounts leave little doubt that trade of all sorts increased during the eighteenth century, along with cash payments to rulers ; and the English Company retrieved accounts of payments to minions of the Nawab in Tirunelveli dating back to the 1740s. [Ludden 1988] But how were increasing trade and cash tribute related to one another and how were both connected to village society ?

Early English observers were not troubled by these questions, for it appears from surveys and censuses of Mysore and Madras hinterlands that they saw caste simply as a division of labor, wherein groups specialized in different occupations and trades. Caste lists produced before 1820 normally translate vernacular caste names by

occupation, when possible, and thus include a large number of castes under the heading of "farmers," for example. [Ceded Districts] The prominence of trade in India seemed natural to Thomas Munro, whose Ryotwari revenue scheme was based on the claim that native commercial activity needed to be liberated from extortionate state revenue demands. If caste was religious, that was no obstacle to commerce, as Munro argued in his 1812 testimony to the House of Commons :

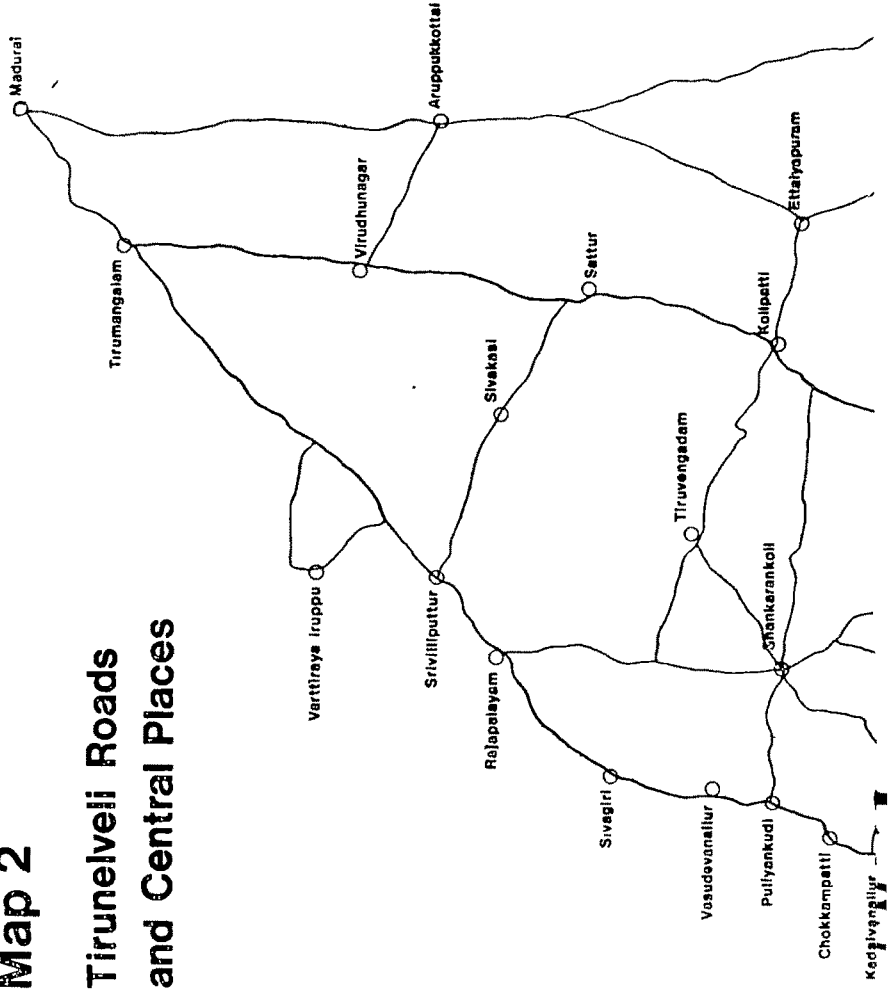
The people of India are as much a nation of shopkeepers as we are ourselves. They never lose sight of the shop : they carry it into all their concerns, religious and civil. Religion and trade are sister arts : the one is seldom found in any large assembly without the society of the other. [Arbuthnot, II, 232]

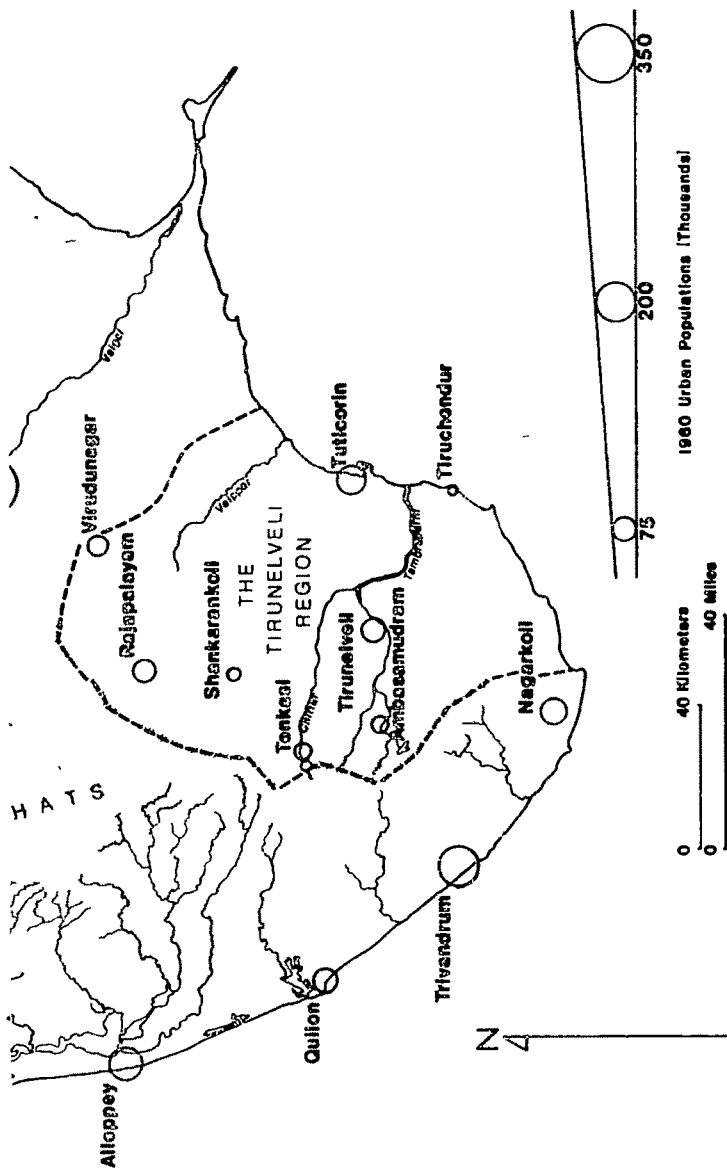
Though Brahmans were most influential native informants and key figures in company administration, it seems they appeared to Company minds first as specialists in a division of labor, rather than as a supreme *varna*. By 1820, this has changed ; how, we cannot say exactly. Yet it seems that as the village became for the Company the foundation of Indian society, legal principles were needed to determine order in that society without reference to structures larger than the village. Company officials collected evidence on rights and they privileged documentary charters of rights from "ancient kings" ; but such positive evidence was often lacking and law required logic to fill in gaps. Caste hierarchy provided that logic. By 1820, official proceedings are full of cases and reports on the traditional, religious, social order of villages, self-regulated by caste and panchayat, demanding recognition in Company law.

Caste lists by 1820 uniformly use *varnas* to rank castes and many were compiled under the Surveyor General. The most complete Company correct information on caste populations in Madras Presidency was the 1823 "Census and Dehazada of the Province of Tirunelveli," compiled by surveyor Thomas Turnbull for the collector of Tinnevely District. Turnbull must have circulated a standard form for Taluk officials to complete, because 185 standard categories of data appear in separate returns from Tirunelveli taluks. But many categories (several hundred) were added to these standard

Map 2

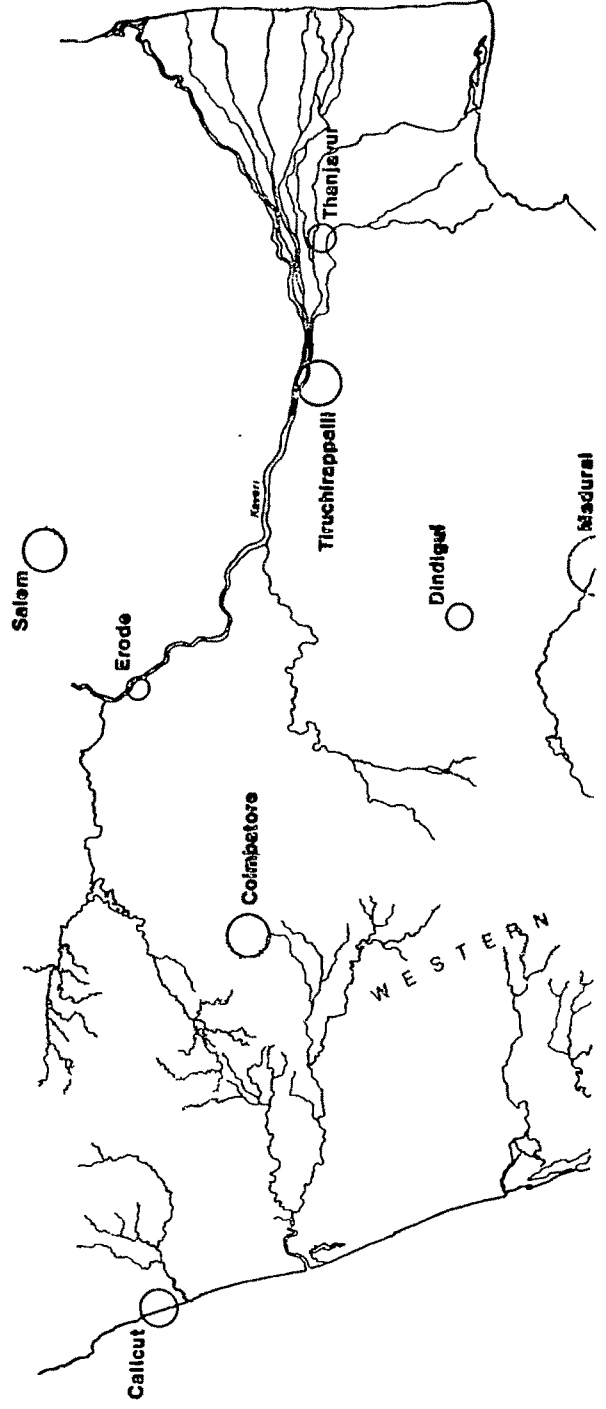
Tirunelveli Roads and Central Places

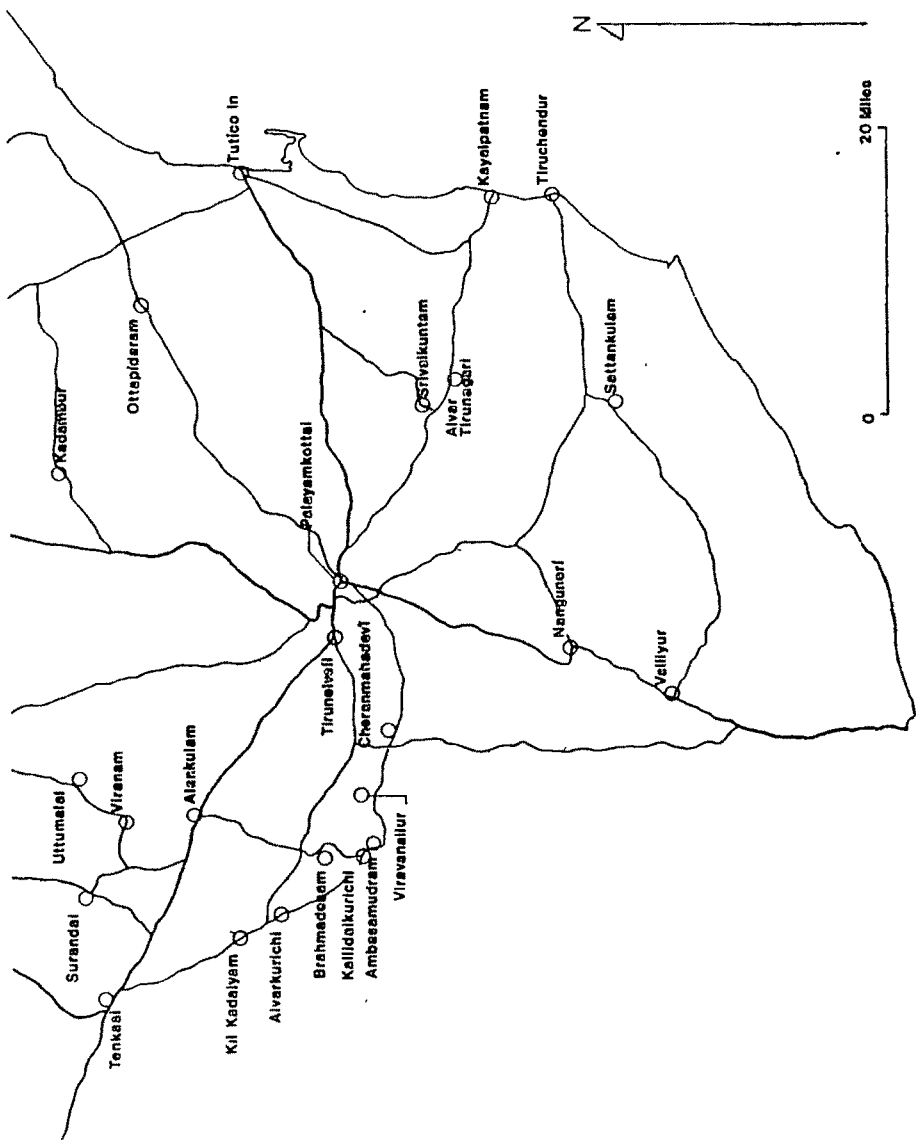




Map 1

The Tip of India





average of index item values yields an index value. High index values, far above the sample average, indicate that a census village contains a high proportion of artisan and/or commercial activity; for simplicity, we can say that this means it is more urban in economic character. Low index values render a village more rural in these terms: this means in practice that it contained few taxed assets other than land counted in the dehzada tables of Turnbull's 1823 census.

Table 1

**The Urban-Rural Gradient in Tirunelveli :
Four Taluks in 1823
(Percentages are of Sample Total)**

Economic Types	Villages Population		Index 100 Farm Acres		Economic Population Per	
	N	%	Average	%	Average	Total Wet
I. Urban Areas	36	22	2,253	34	5.87	116
Large Urban Center	6	4	4,813	17	4.28	101
Midsize Town	15	9	1,492	13	4.52	103
Commercial Suburb	15	9	454	4	8.81	145
II. Small Towns	8	5	427	2	2.32	63
III. Rural Areas	115	72	1,492	62	0.73	24
Large Rural Area	16	10	2,633	25	0.78	23
Midsize Rural Area	22	14	1,446	19	0.69	20
Small Rural Area	77	48	398	18	0.72	30
						57

Note : Taluks are Tenkasi, Shanakarankoil (minus Zamindaris), Brahmadേശ, and Shermadevi. For Index A definition, see note 39 and Appendix. For definition of "farmland," see note 38.

Source : Ludden 1988. Tamil Nadu Archives, Revenue Department Sundries No. 39, "Census and Dehzada of the Province of Tirunelveli."

We can see economic differentiation in the village landscape by combining population size with the economic index. A third of the total sample population lived in localities with relatively high proportions of non-agricultural assets, in large urban centers, towns, and suburbs. Omitting urban areas, a gradient from high to low

items, showing the diversity of taluk administration and of local ideas about what was important to include. All castes are grouped in the census in ranked *varna* categories: Brahmans, Sudras, Inferior Sudras, and Low Castes are tabulated and subtotaled among Hindus; Christians and Muslims are counted and distinguished by caste separately. Still, there remains an effort to show castes by occupation: vernacular names label barbers, potters, washermen, dyers, etc. The combination of caste definitions—by occupation, *varna*, religion, sect, and locality—continued in caste lists over the colonial period, and this reflects multiple criteria for caste definition in native society. But after 1820, the hegemony of *varna* in perceptions of caste has a colonial mandate, even if it did not fit caste ideas in the Tamil country.

Empirical difficulties did not prevent Europeans from theorizing caste into a unified social order, based on religious prescription, dominating all human existence in India's self-sufficient villages. By 1850, this construct was an established historical fact; it became a component of Marx's Asiatic Mode of Production, which saw the state, trade, and caste in pre-colonial India in a light that Munro would not have imagined. For Marx, because religion prescribed the division of labor in self-sufficient villages, pre-colonial states always needed coercion to pry loose surplus from villages in the form of tribute, and this provided liquid wealth for commodity circulation as well as the key to India's Asiatic immobility. [Avineri] Nineteenth century science thus theorized out of Indian history indigenous commercial expansion based on a multiplication of exchange values inside the economic history of Indian society.

But Turnbull's 1823 census reveals local foundations of tributary commercialism in Tirunelveli. I have used dehazada (revenue census) data for 159 villages in four taluks to describe an intricately differentiated agrarian landscape [1988], whose outline appears in Table 1. The economic index in this table measures the degree to which forty-three dehazada items plus total population concentrate in each census village in proportion to farm acreage. A census village index value of 1.00 for an index item means that its percent of the sample total of that item is the same as its percent of total farmland in the 159 village sample. For each village, the simple

concentrations of non-agricultural assets differentiates the remaining 115 census-villages. So the picture is not one of sharp disjuncture between urban and rural, but rather of a gradual slope from higher to lower index values, from more urban to more rural localities, with some extreme cases at both ends.

In my previous work I emphasize the role of irrigation in raising land productivity and differentiating localities. Urban areas had on average 3.54 times more cultivated wet (irrigated) land than total farmland; small towns 3.18 as much; and rural areas had a range of ratios running from 2.42 down to 0.04. Farmland under wells was not included in the wet classification but also differentiated villages, particularly in dry-farming areas where no other irrigation was available for valuable garden crops like sugar, tobacco, chillies, and vegetables. Dry grains like oil seeds and cotton had important commercial value for dry-farming villagers, as did local deposits of iron and hillside woodlands. Even so, concentrations of consumers for dry village products were in more urban areas, where their buying power rested on superior water supplies from drainage irrigation. Urban areas grew in proportion to the water, paddy, and the food for workers they could provide. Service groups, artisans, merchants, and unskilled workers sought employment where investments in irrigation poured water onto the land. Urban buyers generated demand for rural products and labor. Urban financiers collected and transmitted government revenue to enhance portfolios that included land, grain, temple endowments, and other assets. Sixty percent of state revenue came directly from irrigated land, some collected in cash from speculators who received government grain for retail sales over the coming months, and the rest collected by government in grain for sale in its own granaries. Revenues from temples, customs, and other taxes came from or passed through the hands of commercial men in urban centers; the revenue assets that stayed in their hands they could invest in irrigated agriculture, trade, and revenue contracting, to expand the state's financial base.

But urban development needed more than water. Five of six urban centers in our 1823 sample lay in tracts watered by Tambraparni and Chittar Rivers; but one, Shankarankoil, lay in a tract of poor soil and irrigation to the north. [Ludden 1985: Maps 8, 10] Urban

centers held 17% of the sample population but only 9% of its cultivated wet land, perhaps the most intensely farmed in the region, as indicated by the low proportion (3%) of uncultivated wet land in urban centers. Investments in irrigation came into these centers because of their centrality as markets, and part of this centrality came from the state. Four of the six urban centers were taluk headquarters. Urban centers and major towns held 30% of the sample population, only 21% of the cultivated wet land, but 80% of state headquarters (katcheries), 44% of town custom stations, 63% of road custom stations, and 53% of government granaries. Government concentrated in these sites because they were market centers in their own right. In their ample borders urban centers had only 18 cultivated wet acres for every one hundred people, whereas the average for rural areas was 40 and for small rural areas 55. However intense local farming, urban areas fed many more people per local wet acre because they bought food in addition to other resources. Urban centers and major towns, with 30% of the sample population, held 43% of principal temples, 48% of mandapams, 76% of chattrams, and 56% of the major annual festivals; they had 58% of all two-story houses, 51% of terraced and 53% of tile roof houses; 64% of all taxed looms, 46% of all silver shops, 61% of all brazier shops, and 38% of all carts. That the six urban centers were central for production of high-cost items of long-distance trade appears in the fact that they held 70% of the 251 silk looms and 78% of 1,449 Kaikkolar looms; 94% of the silk looms were in urban centers and major towns together.

By contrast, only 38% of 772 Muslim looms, 11% of 350 Shanar looms, and 20% of 330 Pallar looms were in urban centers. Commercial weaving was therefore not as concentrated as high-quality production, and looms were spread all over Tirunelveli. Still, taxed looms in the 1823 census were spatially concentrated: only 21 of 159 villages in our sample had indexes higher than 1.0 for total looms in proportion to total population. These 21 had higher percentages of looms than of people. They were weaving centers large and small. They include six urban centers, three major towns and two commercial suburbs, but also one small town and five small rural areas. Because it is likely that taxed looms were engaged in commercial production, it seems that even small rural localities

could sustain commercial weaving, in part from local demand, in part from trade along the urban-rural continuum. - Thus we find concentrations of Muslim and Kaikkolar weavers in five small rural areas. Small rural villages, in addition, with about the same total population as urban centers, had many more taxed oil mills (28 to 12), betel gardens (45 to 4), betel bazaars (26 to 5), carpenter's yards (67 to 32), potters' works (66 to 25), periodic festivals (105 to 68) and bazaars (141 to 118), in addition to cows, plows, bulls, buffaloes, and commercially valuable trees (coconut, supari nut, jack, mango, tamarind, and palmyra). So urban and rural areas were not distinguished by the mere presence of taxed commercial assets, but rather by the scale of their respective commercial and especially artisan, merchant, and state capital accumulation, and by the relative preponderance of farming and agricultural assets in each.

Labor Specialization and Caste Settlement

Locational decisions by families in caste groups distributed the labor and capital that energized early-modern economic development. [See Ludden, Forthcoming 1] Some caste groups, especially very large castes, which included many occupational distinctions within them, were spread across the urban-rural continuum, to integrate town and country ; while other populous castes were very clearly concentrated on one or the other end of the continuum, as indicated in Table 2. Vellalas and Brahmans had dominated the heavily irrigated, medieval core areas in Tirunelveli [Ludden 1985, 15-42], but in 1823 they show very different residential preferences. Brahmans lived more in urban areas, but among the major Brahman groups, Smarta Telugus, who migrated into the region in post-medieval centuries, did so much more commonly than Smarta Tamils or Sri Vaishnavas. On the other hand, native (Pandya) Vellalas spread over centuries just as the whole population, as did the immigrant Tondaimandala Mudalis ; while immigrant Karaikkattu Vellalas split between rural and strong urban preferences, and Chōla and Tulu Vellalas preferred rural settings. Other large immigrant caste groups split on similar lines : among Maravas, Kondaiyan-kottais and Kotalies favored rural and urban settings, respectively, which in effect meant that relatively few of the larger Kondaiyan-kottai group lived in the Zamindari (formerly Poligar) towns :

Uttumaliai, Surandai, and Chokkampatti. Shanars had very strong rural preferences. The largest landless labor caste, the Pallas, settled as did the whole population, but eschewed urban centers, which suggests a distinct caste profile for the urban labor force that we also glimpse from other data.

Table 2 : Percent of Caste Population in Locality Types

	Urban Areas				Rural Areas			All Urban	All Rural
	Lrg Ctrs	Big Twn	Urb Sub	Sml Twn	Lrg	Med	Sml		
Total Population	17	13	4	2	25	19	18	34	62
Number of Castes	9	15	6	2	26	18	24	30	68
<i>Brahmans</i> (total)	28	18	6	2	14	15	16	52	45
<i>Non-Brahman Religious Specialists</i> (total)	29	19	2	2	17	14	18	50	49
<i>Sudras</i> (total)	18	13	4	2	25	20	17	35	62
Pandya Vellala	19	15	9	3	19	14	21	43	54
Karaikkattu Vellala	49	2	2	0	8	9	29	53	46
Chola/Tulu Vellala	8	0	0	1	1	15	75	8	91
Tondaimandala Mudali	14	17	4	1	28	19	17	35	64
Chetties	25	20	1	1	13	25	15	46	53
Villay Jeddiyan	14	20	0	0	34	18	14	34	66
Vaniyan	10	14	5	4	29	18	20	29	67
Silk Weavers	75	14	0	0	1	8	2	89	11
Kaikkolar Weavers	70	5	0	4	10	8	2	75	20
Kondaiyankottai Maravas	5	10	2	2	44	18	20	17	82
Kotaly Maravas	18	34	6	4	7	13	17	58	37
Panan	20	31	4	9	13	17	7	55	37
Chalupan	9	26	51	0	5	3	7	86	15
Artisans	19	12	6	2	24	17	18	37	59
Cuddashelkaran	19	31	0	0	1	7	42	50	50
Potters	15	15	5	1	19	16	29	35	64
Barbers	20	17	4	2	21	19	17	41	57

	Urban Areas				Rural Areas			All	All
	Lrg Ctrs	Big Twn	Urb Sub	Sml Twn	Lrg	Med	Sml	Urban	Rural
Washermen	12	12	18	2	23	17	17	42	57
Dyers	50	21	15	3	1	2	9	86	12
Muslims (total)	32	6	1	2	32	14	13	39	59
Christians (total)	38	13	1	2	25	18	3	52	46
Inferior Sudras (total)	5	14	2	1	35	24	19	21	78
Elavas	11	20	5	2	28	13	20	36	61
Shanars	2	14	2	1	37	26	19	18	82
Cunniyans	35	19	27	4	7	0	7	81	14
Koravas	22	5	2	2	26	26	17	29	69
Low Castes (total)	9	15	6	2	26	18	24	30	68
Pallas	6	15	6	2	27	18	27	27	72
Vallavas	25	23	0	0	27	5	20	48	52
Pariahs	19	18	6	1	19	17	20	43	56
Shinimaun or Chuckler	1	3	1	1	36	33	24	5	93

Note : For details see Ludden, Forthcoming.

Source : Tamil Nadu Archives, Revenue Department Sundries No. 39,
"Census and Dehazada of the Province of Tirunelvelie."

The small caste groups that comprise about half the total sample population show the most marked urban-rural preferences. Many small castes do not appear on all four taluk census tables that constitute my sample; some appear only on one taluk return and some only in a few villages within one taluk. These can be presumed to have been of subregional or even local significance in official perceptions of caste, which were clearly related to their political and economic significance. [Ludden 1988] It is interesting then that at the top of Table 2, a much smaller percentage of castes than of the total population live in urban centers; and that, by contrast a larger percentage of castes than of population appear in small rural areas. This indicates that many small castes lived only in small rural areas, which explains their lack of region-wide enumeration. A few small castes with rural residential preferences

do appear in all four taluk census tables : Vyravers, Chola and Tulu Vellalas, and Chucklers. But many small castes with strong urban preferences appear : non-Brahman temple specialists ("the religious establishment"), Karaikkattu Vellalas, Chetties, Patnulkaran and Pattashalayan silk weavers, Kaikkolars, Chalupans, Cudashelkarans, Panans, Dyers, Pattulu Muslims, Pariah Christians, and Cunniyans.

Underlying tributary commercialism we see a complex and moving social world of residential decisions and caste settlement. In small rural census villages, major dominant castes (Vellalas, Maravas, and Brahmans) and major landless labor caste (Pallas) usually comprised the majority of the population. But local concentrations of artisans (weavers, potters, Panchalars) or merchants (Chetties, Villay Jedians) were as common here as of subordinate farming castes (Shanar, Pariah, and many unenumerated castes). Moving up the urban-rural continuum, local concentrations of groups that move readily into locations of market opportunity became prominent, but this progression was gradual, for opportunities concentrated even in rural areas. A dry urban suburb, Vagaikulam (pop. 837), just south of Brahmadesam, had the highest village percentage of Panchalars (17%), and also a high concentration of brass works, as well as many Shanar looms, limekilns and betel bazaars ; but a small rural village, Pottalputur (pop. 504), six miles northwest of Brahmadesam, had the next highest percent Panchalar population (12%), along with concentrations of mat and gunny frames and oil mills. The highest village proportion of Chalupens are in two urban suburbs. In one, near Shermadevi (Vellankoil, pop. 294) Chalupens were 16% of the population ; in the other, six miles east (Kilachevel, pop. 656) they were 12%. Both places had huge concentrations of gunny frames.

Caste movement to work in specialized settlements supported the economy of manufacture and trade as a whole, but especially, perhaps, the weaving industry. [Baker] The Madras Council complained bitterly in the 1740s that "weavers when disgusted leave lighted lamps in their houses and remove to some other part of the country, so that whole towns are deserted in a night." [Chaudhuri, 252-3] The demographic results of weaver mobility are sometimes startling. Kaikkolars were a majority of the population (56%) in the urban suburb of Turtikulam Devasthanam, near Uttumalai town

(pop. 312), but were numerically prominent even in the major urban centers of Ambasamudram (33%), Shankarankoil (20%), and Tenkasi (12%). Tenkasi's many Muslim looms and 29% Muslim population suggest that perhaps a third of its population engaged in cloth trades. A quarter of Viravanallur's 4,833 urban population were silk weaving Patnulkarans and Patta-shalayans. The weaving industry also involved regular movement among settlements. Not only did cotton, silk, dyes, looms, thread, gunny sacks, and cloth circulate among villages, towns, and urban areas [Ludden 1989]—each being produced in specialized locations—but weavers and loom owners moved across local boundaries in their everyday work routines. In Tenkasi and other Muslim weaving centers, like Ravanasamudram (north of Brahmadesam, (pop. 489) and Kallidaikurichi (pop. 4,651), resident Muslims would have been sufficient to work the looms counted in those places; but where Muslim looms were most densely concentrated, in urban suburbs Vellankoil and Minakshipuram (pop. 996, nr. Tirunelveli) there were no Muslims resident in the census village at all.

Conclusions

Looking at late pre-colonial political economy from below makes the history written by Habib, Jones, and Wallerstein seem suspiciously imperial and many of their arguments dubious indeed. The late Mughal agrarian crisis was probably rooted more in uneven regional growth than in excess revenue extraction. Evidence does not indicate that imperial extraction stymied commercial capital accumulation in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Even war presented opportunities for profit and the pursuit of taxable resources in peacetime would lead rulers to favor commodity producers and merchants even to the extent of making them central in the revenue system. State extraction and competition for power could therefore increase commercial capital accumulation, as it appears to have done in many cases. Jones' idea that good land was becoming scarce in the face of population growth is absurd: there were expanses of high quality land onto which farmers expanded well into the twentieth century; vast tracts lay waiting for more irrigation. Preindustrial technology was far from exhausted as a

means to increase productivity. Wallerstein's idea of a capitalist world-economy invading an India in which a Mughal world-economy had collapsed presupposes a collapsed political economy that we do not see in regions of the subcontinent. Regional continuity during Mughal decline in economic and political trends that had once supported Mughal power is pronounced; and indeed, these trends supported the rise of British power in coastal regions.

In Tirunelveli, we can look beneath the revenue landscape—with its networks and centers of power, articulated by points of collection and transmission—to discover a complex and evolving landscape of agrarian commodity production. Its historical dynamism came from combinations of labor, technology, and financial assets moving on the land. Though India's agricultural population become more sedentary as land use intensified over centuries before 1800; sedentarization was surely most intense and pervasive in the most intensively farmed, watered, and revenue productive coastal regions where the Company gained its initial foothold and began to formal oriental tradition. But considering the subcontinent as a whole for the half-millennium before 1800, it seems that productive forces developed in motion. Migration is critical in the political economy of early-modern India. In Tirunelveli, about forty-five percent of the 1823 population had histories of migration into the region after 1300.

Migration, settlement, and local investments in productivity produced the agrarian landscape that provided revenue for states. It was a patchwork of specialization, filled with small, medium, and large concentrations of population, commercial activity, and artisan production, centers of revenue transactions connected by roads and pathways. Roads were bad by modern standards, but very easy to make, and except for long-haul traffic through major centers, free to use; so that new centers of economic specialization could pop up anywhere local resources allow, without being seriously disadvantaged by transport costs in the inter-village marketing system. Transport costs were very high, and units of commodity transport very small, but local specialization generated flows of small commodity loads from village to village up and down the gradient from more agricultural to more non-agricultural locations. Major urban

areas produce for long-distance trade and were just about the only places producers for that trade—silk and fine cloth weavers—settled. Major urban areas were also centers of government, but like smaller urban centers they drew their raw materials—cotton, dyes, oil, toddy, iron, wood, brick, stone, lime, tobacco—as well as food, labor, animals, and revenue finance, from surrounding rural areas to which they were connected not only by trade and labor flows but by extended class relations defined in part by state revenue hierarchies. Commodities produced in small batches, moving in small batches—on human heads, on bullock backs, and in carts—and sold in small batches, generated many small accumulations of commercial capital and a few fortunes in urban centers. State revenue in many parts of India in the Mughal era came from such areas of commodity production, labor specialization, and economic differentiation. Revenues from land, temples, customs, and sundry taxes came directly from or passed through the hands of commercially active locals in urban centers. The revenue assets that stayed in their hands they used for consumption and investments in agriculture, manufacture, commercial activity, and revenue contracts, and thus in building the financial base of early-modern states.

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RECENT TRENDS IN THE WRITING OF MODERN INDIAN HISTORY

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In this survey, I want to look at what are, in my opinion, the two most important recent trends in the writing of modern Indian history. These are developments of this decade and both are concerned with providing revisions of the kinds of analysis that had become the stock-in-trade of historians through the middle sixties and the seventies. Their revisionism is of two very different kinds as I will try to explain. Before that, let me clear certain misconceptions about the term revisionism. Most people, especially on the left, are understandably touchy about the term. It has acquired in leftist parlance a definite pejorative usage. Anything that sought to challenge/modify the given orthodoxy of a period was dismissed under the convenient label of revisionism. The intellectual lineage of the term, even in the Marxist lexicon itself, shows that the pejorative usage had deliberately narrowed the significance of the word¹. Revisionism in its wider and proper connotation is an integrated part of any theory, particularly of Marxist theory. A theory committed to not only interpreting the world but also to changing it, an epistemology which has self-conscious agents in dialectical interaction with the known object, can hardly freeze itself with a given body of ideas which are beyond revision.

That longish introduction permits me, I hope, to use the word revisionism without raising too many eyebrows. I have already indicated that the revisions that the two trends represent are of different kinds: I would like to describe them as (a) restorative revisionism and (b) radical revisionism. The first attempts to strengthen and consolidate with sophistication and range of historical evidence certain conclusions and methods of analysis that had increasingly come under suspicion in the seventies. I will illustrate this with a discussion of Chris Bayly's analysis of the nature of British expansion and the imperial impact. The second trend, typified in the writings of the historians and social scientists engaged in the *Subaltern Studies* project, questions the assumptions and

conclusions of all historical writing on modern India : they seek to provide a different and a radical framework for historical enquiry.

To understand the nature of these twin revisions it is necessary to sketch briefly the state of the analysis as it stood in the seventies. Historical writing then was largely dominated by the confrontation of imperialism and nationalism. There was also a racial divide involved. Indian historians were by and large concerned with analysing in great detail the exploitative impact of colonialism. Further, historians showed how the experience of economic exploitation and political subjugation brought about the birth of Indian nationalism, a force which under the leadership of men like Gandhi united Indians cutting across caste, class and community under the umbrella of the Congress, and against British rule. It was this struggle culminating in 1947, failures and twists and turns notwithstanding, that *made* the Indian nation. Against this and, in fact, as a reaction the Anglo-Saxon historians of India, South Asianists as they are known in the groves of British and U. S. academia, wrote a series of monographs and articles trying to show (a) that it was not economic motives that pushed forward the British political frontier in India, (b) that colonial rule had not been as exploitative and discriminatory as the nationalist historians had made out, and (c) that nationalism was largely a myth : a rhetorical flourish on the part of an English educated elite to cover up their innumerable faction fights over jobs and opportunities thrown up by British rule. In a different version of the same argument provincial or national platforms were the products of expedient patron-client alliances following constitutional reforms of the British through which they sought new collaborators.

II

Chris Bayly's book² is only marginally concerned with the last of the above three points. He analyses the foundations of British expansion, the nature of the Indian response to it and therefore the nature of the imperial impact. His work is a major work of synthesis bringing together many strands of economic and social history and often appears to break new interpretative ground.

Bayly's point of departure is what he calls 'truism' in colonial historiography : European expansion in Asia and Africa would not

have been possible without 'the compliance of key people in indigenous societies' ³. This idea is borrowed, as Bayly himself admits, from Ronald Robinson's famous essay on the subject⁴. It was Robinson's view that :

Its [imperialism's] central mechanism may be found in the systems of collaboration set up in pre-industrial societies, which succeeded (or failed) in meshing the incoming processes of European expansion into indigenous social politics and in achieving some kind of evolving equilibrium between the two.⁵

This view in Robinson's own version harks back to some formulations in the celebrated Gallagher-Robinson essay on 'The Imperialism of Free Trade'⁶. And the view has affinities with the views of Sir John Seeley who argued that it would be a mistake to believe that the British had conquered India : the East India Co. had got embroiled in Indian politics, disturbed as they were after the decline of the Mughal Empire, and they had merely taken advantage of these conditions through the support of important groups of Indians⁷.

It was precisely this kind of view that Indian historians in the sixties and the seventies had sought to attack⁸. That the British Empire had been established in a 'fit of absent mindedness', that it had no European origins seemed completely unacceptable. Indeed, the anti-imperialist historians held the view :

that the same social, political and economic process that produces industrial development and social and cultural progress in Britain, the metropolis, also produced and then maintained economic underdevelopment and social and cultural backwardness in India, the colony. The two countries were organically linked with each other and participated for nearly two centuries in a common, integrated world economic system, though with dissimilar, indeed, opposite consequences⁹.

It is this kind of view that Bayly is seeking to revise, but in so doing he is falling back on a set of arguments which are, in fact, much older, harking back to the fifties, even to the last decades of the nineteenth century. Hence, his revisions are fundamentally of a restorative kind. One could even aver that the arguments only have the *appearance* of a revision. In their assumptions they are repeating certain stereotypes made familiar by apologists of the Raj.

To flesh out this theory Bayly has to begin with an analysis of the indigenous economy. This is where Bayly makes his first major revision. In the conventional analysis, the eighteenth century has always been seen as the 'Dark Age' or the 'Black Century'. It was bleak from two different vantage points : from the peaks of Mughal grandeur of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well as from the so-called achievements of pax Britannica and the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century. Bayly seriously questions and modifies the grim picture of the eighteenth century. He does not deny that political change and turmoil of the eighteenth century produced serious decline in local commerce and agriculture. Such decline, where it occurred, was the consequence not only of war but also of 'the orderly movement of aristocracies, capital or skills from one centre to another and the subsequent realignment of trade and production'¹⁰. But such movements, and Bayly makes the point emphatically, was not something pathological but an integral part of the social order of that particular century. Such 'patches of decline' were, however, offset by three features :

"First...the areas of decline were quite limited in extent. Secondly, their existence actually advantaged the richer and more stable territories which preyed on them. Thirdly, the farmers, merchants and aristocrats of the stable areas were already expanding outwards to colonise the waste before the imposition of the British Peace at the beginning of the nineteenth century."¹¹

As the above passage indicates these were territories which were politically stable like Haiderabad, Awadh and Bengal. Such areas were successor states of the Mughal Empire established by Mughal noblemen. They inherited not only the political style of Mughal court but also retained a close control over natural resources¹². Thus :

Political decentralization [as Bayly writes] encouraged the growing economic vitality of small places away from the imperial capitals. Magnates and gentry employed by the regional states founded fixed markets and settled colonies of specialist cultivators around them. Local traders extended their branch agencies to secure the flows of artisan products and provided advances for the fine crops which the local aristocracies and armies needed. This pattern was widespread throughout India. Islands of high farming and commercial enterprise existed around the courts and camps of all the lavish-spending contemporary nobilities¹³.

Some of the above points were made in the mid-sixties in a much-neglected essay by Barun De¹⁴. And more recently Bayly has been followed by Muzaffar Alam¹⁵ from a different perspective, in seeing the eighteenth century as not essentially a period of decline and instability but one containing areas of economic growth and vitality.

Such changes in the first half of the eighteenth century, essentially 'in origin and form indigenous...pushed forward by Indian aristocrats, Islamic administrators and the expansion of a Hindu commercial class and peasantry'¹⁶ persisted, according to Bayly, well into the Company era. Thus the colonial economy and colonial expansion had strong indigenous foundations :

Company government and private trade benefited from the final flowering of the 'decentralized' economy of successor states. The great consumer cities—Lucknow, Benares, Fyzabad, Farrukhabad—continued to grow. Local merchant communities which had seized their first opportunities in the dissolution of the Mughal hegemony, pressed home their advantage. They found new security on the great trade routes and in British revenue courts; their quid pro quo was to guarantee the British revenue system as they had guaranteed its Mughal predecessor. The integrated system of markets and revenue extraction in cash which had been in evidence in the eighteenth century surplus areas was now extended to the unstable tracts to the west. Magnate, village leader and nomadic wanderer were all drawn more firmly into a rigid cash revenue system. But there were limits imposed to the resulting commercial economy which were as much the inheritance of Indian political forms as results of the aims of the British themselves¹⁷.

The implications of this are important. First, since there was a continuity of pre-colonial times to colonial times (and Bayly prefers in a chapter heading to use the words colonial economy within quotation marks, i. e. denoting a catachresis), it follows that the Indian economy did not suffer any structural change following British intervention. Indeed, the economy and the people involved in it aided British penetration. Second, following from the first, the British presence was a part of the indigenous framework, nothing fundamentally new. And third, Europe's foray into India was, in fact, frustrated because of circumstances : 'The Europeans did well

enough out of India but not as well as they intended'¹⁸. Elsewhere, he writes again, 'Indian business methods, and the political context within which they were set, transformed and frustrated the *feeble* European impulse'¹⁹ (emphasis mine).

Bayly shows in some detail how British trade, Company and private, utilized the existing commercial networks and institutions in the Ganges valley²⁰. And he argues that this trade standing at about Rs 25 lakhs in any given year before 1800 had only a limited effect. Parts of this trade Bayly admits were novel, for example, 'Mirzapur' cotton, but it was proto colonial since as yet the goods were destined neither for China or Europe²¹. This is, indeed, a very strange way of argument in history. Bayly deliberately cuts off history at a point to obfuscate what, in terms of the future decades, was emerging as a very dominant tendency²². It has been argued that 'Mirzapur' cotton was becoming extremely important in the export into Calcutta and this demand originated from the China market²³. Bayly is not unaware of this for he writes, 'between 1790 and 1820 the price of cotton at Mirzapur "depended entirely on the relative prices in China, the supposed demand in consequence, and the quantity likely to be produced in Guzerat"²⁴. Mark the date 1790: ten years before 1800 north Indian raw cotton had become responsive to what was essentially a colonial demand... This burgeons, as Bayly admits, in the first decades of the nineteenth century²⁵. Bayly, however, does deny that this trade had any transforming impact on the agrarian or commercial economy²⁶. This is directly against the conclusion of Asiya Siddiqi with whom strangely enough Bayly does not even polemicize. It is as if Ms Siddiqi's text is dismissed out of hand. Asiya Siddiqi has shown how British penetration led to a forced and exaggerated cultivation of cotton and indigo meant for world and inter-Asian trade. This made the rural economy susceptible to demands and fluctuations of the international market. This commercialization of agriculture was financed by capital controlled by the Agency Houses. Changes in the conditions of the overseas market led to flight of capital and to all round agrarian dislocation and distress²⁷.

Bayly is aware of this tie-up of the north Indian economy with the fluctuations of capitalist trade cycles. He writes, 'By 1825,... gross demand in the north Indian economy was being affected by the

trade cycles of European capitalism through the medium of the China trade. But in most respects, the economy remained pre-capitalist for at least another century'²⁸. That, precisely, is the point. For two decades now, Indian economic historians have been arguing that India became a part of the world capitalist system but in a subordinate position. This, seriously distorted the economy via a mingling of colonial and indigenous exploitation which made the emergence of capitalism half-cocked. Feeling the impact of capitalism through foreign rule and becoming capitalist are two separate issues which Bayly seems to be confusing.

The fact that there had been changes, crucial in their nature and in their impact, cannot be altogether denied. One could even say that there was a structural change since large parts of the northern Indian economy were geared to meet a demand emanating from overseas. Capital and credit were largely being controlled by the Agency Houses and trade in items like grain, raw cotton, and other commodities which had in 1784 been in the hands of Indian merchants, was moving into European hands²⁹. All this combined with the fact of a relentless drive for higher revenues including localization of production, increased monetization and a shift from subsistence farming³⁰, and political intervention hardly adds up to a 'feeble impulse'. Neither does it point to the fact that colonialization had indigenous origins. As to the British not doing as well as they intended, I am afraid an Indian historian suffering still from the powers of colonial darkness can only be startled by the brazenness of the statement. For one thing, one really does not know what the limits of the Britons' greed were, hence how well they intended to do is an imponderable. And for another, if they had not done well enough they could have got out earlier than they eventually did. One presumes that Bayly's answer would be that they could not since they had got involved in an Indian empire in a fit of absent mindedness.

That brings us back to the idea of collaborators with which we began. At one level, it is surely banal to say that the establishment of an empire needs the support of sections of the native population. Without that, the structure of an alien empire would be more fragile than it is. As Robinson wrote :

Without the voluntary or enforced co-operation of their

governing elites, economic resources could not be transferred, strategic interests, protected or xenophobic reaction and traditional resistance to change contained⁸¹.

In other words, the collaborators had either to be coerced or persuaded. This is to locate collaboration in a relationship of power since domination, that universal element in any authority structure, expresses itself through the idioms of coercion and persuasion. This, Bayly's notion and description of collaboration fails to do since he sees it in terms of give and take or in terms of mutual advantage: collaboration is seen in terms of a series of business transactions. To situate power so centrally, Bayly, in fact, would have to change the terms of his discourse which is precisely what the other, radical, kind of revisionism succeeds in doing.

III

To do this *Subaltern Studies* has to proceed from a critique of the existing historiography which, according to these writers, is tainted by elitism. This elitism is of two kinds—colonialist and bourgeois nationalist. The first views all developments in modern India, especially the growth of nationalism, as a 'function of stimulus and response'. It represents 'nationalism as the sum of activities and ideas by which the Indian elite responded to the institutions, opportunities, resources generated by colonialism.' The second shows that the Indian elites, placed in an antagonistic relation to the colonial regime, led the Indian people to freedom and made the Indian nation. 'The history of Indian nationalism is thus written up as a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite.' In short, *Subaltern Studies* proceeds by rejecting the version of Indian history as was prevalent in the mid-sixties and seventies. This dissatisfaction was the product of the fact that this history left out the history and politics of the people. In the elitist historiography, the history of the people, of subaltern classes, was a mere appendage to what was considered to be the mainstream. The subaltern classes did not have a history of their own. A history of the subaltern classes would show up the false claims that elitist historiography makes for the group it represents. It would show, most importantly, that the Indian bourgeoisie, had failed to 'speak for the Indian nation' that their efforts culminated in the 'historic failure of

the nation to come to its own' because time and time again in the history of Indian nationalism the initiatives of the subaltern classes and the elites' fight for their own narrow objectives parted ways. This failure has to be located thus in the dichotomy between elites and subalterns, i.e., in the binary opposition between domination and subordination: in other words, within a configuration of power⁸².

In the process of this dismantling of the entire structure of modern Indian historiography, the *Subaltern Studies* project is related to certain important issues relating to the Marxist theory of history. It is important to draw out the implications of these to understand the full extent and nature of the revision the project undertakes. What we know as the 'modern' period in Indian history is situated in the framework that informs the evolution of pre-capitalist formations to capitalism. In terms of European history we have the decline of feudalism as a system based on the lord's power and serfdom; the growth of capitalistic processes within the agrarian economy leading to differentiation among the peasantry; the separation of a large number of men from their means of production, especially land, resulting in a proletariat class; and the simultaneous growth of capitalist industries in the towns. These can be said to be the general characteristics of the model⁸³. As an analogous process there develops the hegemony of the bourgeoisie over society, the spread of democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, the growth of representative government and the development of the ideologies of rationalism and possessive individualism. At the various levels of society production relations, state power and culture—the hegemony of the bourgeoisie was complete and beyond question.

Yet, in countries/areas where capitalism was a latecomer or it came by way of colonial subjugation, parts of East or Southern Europe in the one case and Asia and Africa in the other, the process of transition was definitely not as clear. In his writings during his last years, Marx began to grapple with this gap between the theoretic construct of the transition and the specific and different paths followed by each country or parts of the world⁸⁴. Here, the pivotal concept was the uneven development of contradictions in the reproduction of social relations. The uneven development of con-

traditions is manifest when the different aspects of the socio-economic formation do not proceed at the same pace of reproduction. In real history instances abound where the class contradictions in the sphere of economic relations do not run parallel with developments in the sphere of the state or ideology. There might even be specific regional differences in the way class-contradictions develop and manifest themselves. It thus becomes impossible to understand the complex and variegated process with the help of a paradigm built on the experience of western Europe.

It is in meeting this challenge that the elite/subaltern dichotomy gets its significance. This is defined at the level where social relationships are seen to be imbricated in a definite system of domination and subordination. The elite/subaltern dichotomy is thus not located at the level of production relations or as an alternative definition of social classes. On the contrary, it is a complement to the production-relations framework necessary to depict the uneven development of contradictions in historical transitions^{8,9}. Since the transition from one mode of production to another is a question of power, of the political resolution of class conflict, the analysis shifts from an emphasis of the more economic to the network of power relationships and on the political sphere of class struggle. The elite-subaltern framework attempts precisely to locate and analyse these heterogeneous power networks at the various levels of society and to trace the path of their reproductions, to understand their elementary forms.

It is argued that in a given society, the political conflicts of the domination-subordination relationship, located within a mode of production, and the historical possibilities of resolution of those conflicts were articulated in the opposition of two separate types of consciousness. Thus under feudalism, the political character of the lord-serf relationship articulated itself in the historical opposition between the elite feudal consciousness and the subaltern consciousness of the peasantry. This is obviously related in terms of structure to elite domination and the subordination of the subaltern classes. As long as feudalism persists this structure of relationships reproduces itself, yet, in real history, this is not something linear, static and orderly. Political conflicts, revolt and resistance, suppression of rebellion are all evident within it in many uneven and

heterogeneous ways. Through these, changes occur in the politico-legal, religious, and cultural dimensions of the lord-serf relationship: the possibilities of historical development are thus located here in the class conflict.

Given this, the historical analysis of feudalism requires the adequate identification of the two opposed consciousness. In the two poles of the domination-subordination framework were located two opposed classes, both active in the articulation of class conflict; the subalterns are in no way passive recipients of the activities of the dominator. It follows *logically* that the subaltern consciousness is successful in preserving its *independent autonomous* existence and identity. If this were not so, there would be no political articulation of class conflict since the subaltern existence and consciousness would be obliterated and consumed by the dominator. Indeed, there would be no conflict at all. The subaltern classes have thus their own domain of subjectivity, where they are undominated as it were⁸⁶.

This opens up a number of avenues for modern Indian history. For one thing, it becomes possible to study peasant movements in their own terms, with the peasant as the subject of his own history and not as a tailpiece to movements led and initiated by the elites. It also allows for the study of the interface between movements of the subaltern classes and movements of the elite. The idea of collaboration thus does not become a 'truism' as in Bayly but as something located within a configuration of power: its path becomes marked by attempts to appropriate and control forms of popular will and resistance and also by retreats when unable to monitor popular movements for the protection of its own interests and privileges.

The revision this entails in the understanding of peasant movements is evident from Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi 1983). In colonial India, the relationship between the peasant and exploitative triumvirate of *saukari*, *sahukari* and zamindari was clearly a 'relationship of dominance and subordination...a political relationship'⁸⁷. If domination was one aspect in a relationship of power, then the other aspect must be the one opposed to it, i.e. resistance. Thus

Guha writes, '...in undertaking to destory this relationship he [the peasant] engaged himself in what was essentially a political task, a task in which the necessary power nexus had to be turned on its head as a necessary condition for the redress of any particular grievance'³⁸. Precisely, because the peasant's rebellion was a political act, he could not take part in it in a fit of absent-mindedness: he was the conscious maker of his own history'³⁹. What apparently appears to be 'spontaneous' and disorganized' actually has its own logic, and patterns of organization that replicate themselves and has a political purpose. From where are we to find the historical material to reconstruct these patterns? Precisely, in the prose of counter-insurgency where the dominator records his various deeds to quell rebellion. The moment of peasant insurgency is one where the dominated clearly etches his mark on the dominator, the latter is forced to recognize its 'other'⁴⁰. From this refracted material it is possible, as Guha shows, to locate the independent logic of peasant consciousness and its common forms: these can be anatomized and then structured back again into a coherent totality.

Such an approach situates the problematic of peasant insurgency in a way that has never been formulated before even in Marxist historiography. One says this because the central assumption of historiography has been that the history of the peasantry is one where it is essentially passive, it is acted upon by forces other than itself, economy, technology, elite mobilization, policy, what have you. Its history is always shaped by its circumstance, by so many, what in the parlance, is called 'objective' factors. The peasantry is thus always an object of history and never its subject. Thus, in the writings of Eric Hobsbawm peasant rebellions are 'primitive', in Terence Ranger 'traditional', in S. B. Chaudhuri a series of disparate 'civil disturbances' provoked by British rule and in Eric Stokes the great rebellion of 1857 is nothing more than a shapeless facts varying from district to district that render any generalization impossible. Ranged against these, Guha's analysis succeeds in doing exactly the opposite by situating the peasant as a self-constituted sovereign subject shaping his own destiny through a series of collective actions against domination.

Regarding the interface of the two domains of elite and subaltern, the extent of revision can be shown by two examples. In

nationalist historiography Gandhi's interaction with the masses is seen in a straight unilinear fashion. Gandhi mobilized the masses, he brought politics to the people—these are the rusty cliches to which we are so easily accustomed. In a remarkable essay as 'Gandhi as Mahatma'⁴¹, Shahid Amin studies the various rumours about Gandhi in Gorakhpur. These transformed Gandhi into a deity in an area where Gandhi had been only for a day. When Gandhi appeared in Gorakhpur, an area not marked by Congress or Kisan Sabha organizations, there was a militancy in the way the peasants received Gandhi. This considerably irritated Gandhi. His message to them was clear : (a) Hindu-Muslim unity, (b) avoid using lathis, looting etc , (c) enforcing social boycott, (d) boycott of government institutions (e) self-purification by giving up drinking, gambling etc., (f) importance of spinning and weaving. The understanding of his message, however, was derived, as the rumours make evident, 'from the popular Hindu beliefs and practices and the material culture of the peasantry'. Through these Gandhi was seen as an alternative source of authority. There appeared in Gorakhpur the popular notion of 'Gandhiji's Swaraj', this quite independently of the district leadership of the Congress. There was a clear disjunction between the way the populace perceived Gandhi and the 'official' Gandhi. Amin writes, 'There was...no single authorized version of the Mahatma to which the peasants of eastern U.P. and north Bihar may be said to have subscribed in 1921. Indeed, their ideas about Gandhi's "orders" and "powers" were often at variance with those of the local Congress-Khilafat leadership and clashed with the basic tenets of Gandhism itself. The violence at Chauri Chaura was rooted in this paradox'. Thus a recognition of the autonomy of the subaltern domain permits the analysis of how a charisma was projected and how it was received ; it explains the background of one of the major retreats by the nationalist leadership.

A more complicated process of how one of these domains seeks to enter into, break down, transform and incorporate the other into its own forms of exercise of domination is analysed by Partha Chatterjee in the context of Bengal in the first half of the twentieth century⁴². Chatterjee traces five principal elements in the developing class struggle : (i) a declining class of landed proprietors,

(ii) an emerging class of rich peasants-money lenders-traders, (iii) a growing poor peasant-sharecropper-labourer class, (iv) the colonial state, and (v) a middle class intelligentsia. In eastern Bengal, Chatterjee shows that the principal political antagonism was between landlords and tenants. All tenants were, however, not cultivating peasants. In this antagonism an added and significant dimension that was the bigger and powerful landlords were, Hindu; and their dominance was reinforced and demonstrated in terms of upper-caste Hindu superiority, over a predominantly Muslim or lower-caste Hindu peasantry. Further, many Muslims though rent-receivers continued to cultivate their lands themselves and were culturally a part of the peasant community. This opened up distinct political possibilities. Two issues dominated the landlord-peasant relationship: rent and interest. An analysis of the demands made by the Praja movements in the 20s show that they were centred around these issues affecting the peasantry in general. However, peasant resistance did not take the form of an organized Praja Movement particularly in the crucial period 1926-31. Peasant resistance took the form of a series of violent 'communal' clashes against Hindu landlords and moneylenders. These riots, Chatterjee suggests, had the 'general character of resistance among the predominantly Muslim peasantry of the region'. Chatterjee writes,

Ideologically, the participants saw themselves as resisting the unjust domination and exploitation of a peasant community by external enemies. The lines of division were clear in cultural terms: peasant resistance took the forms of act of defiance against targets that symbolized the wealth and power of the dominant classes... The armed strength of landlords... was organized by Hindu zamindars, traders and professionals living in district towns of the region, with open political support from the Hindu Mahasabha.

In this, two related points need to be underscored. First, what in nationalist historiography is written off as communal, the work of mischief-makers or produced by the lack of proper penetration of nationalist ideology or as false-consciousness is in reality a peasant resistance. That the ideology that shaped it was religious is not in the least surprising:

The very nature of peasant consciousness, [writes Chatterjee] the apparently consistent unification of an entire set of beliefs about nature and about men in the collective and

active mind of a peasantry is religious. Religion to such a community provides an ontology and epistemology as well as a practical code of ethics, including political ethics. When this community acts politically, the symbolic meaning of particular acts—their signification—must be found in religious terms⁴³.

Second, the analysis highlights, as does Guha's and Amin's, the strength of the community, in which religion is one binding element, in the resistance and the mentalite of the peasantry. The point needs emphasis because community stands directly opposed to bourgeois consciousness which sees itself as operating from the individual and his preferences. The aggregation of common interests/preferences bring individuals together. In a community individuals form a collective because there already exists bonds of solidarity and ties of commonality. Therefore, community alone can stand against the processes of capital, whether represented in the tortuous workings of the economy, or as a handmaiden of reason, which divides and breaks up collectives to set individuals against individuals. Marx, himself, in his later years, recognized that the archaic resistance of the popular masses in countries not under the sway of capital represented the possibility of a new beginning⁴⁴. One could say by way of extending the *Subaltern Studies* argument, that the nation can be made only on the community, by fulfilling the unfinished projects of Sidhu and Kanu⁴⁵ or of many anonymous peasant rebels who resisted in their own way and with their own logic the imposition of reason, capital and empire⁴⁶.

The extent of revision in historiography that all this entails is far-reaching. I call it radical because it questions the basic assumptions of the existing historiography. These assumptions have concentrated on the universalizing forces of Capital, Progress or Nationalism, whereas this radical revision attempts to break up these problematics. It questions, first, the linear and monistic paradigm of historical understanding, that all countries traverse similar paths of transition. It places the problem of power at the centre of its analysis. This allows it to confront the problem of consciousness and to identify two different domains of politics. These domains have their own forms of consciousness that informs the actions of the participants in the respective domains. The consciousness of the subaltern classes thus cannot be understood in terms that

constitute elite consciousness. Each of them have their own paradigmatic forms. The analysis of the two domains of politics, interrelated but autonomous, opened up possibilities of looking at the course of movements from a completely new perspective. The failure of the nation to come to its own, the inability of the Indian elites to speak for the people can thus be situated in the critical disjunction between the two domains of politics.

This is not to suggest that the task is completed. In fact, the task has only just begun. There are vast territories over which the subaltern historians have not yet marched: there are questions which have been raised more sharply than others. In closing the survey I would like to briefly look at some of these. There is, first, the immense task of *recovering* as much as we can of the history of the subaltern classes. At one level this is concerned with the discovery of unknown or hitherto unused sources of historical information, oral or archival. At another level it is a hermeneutic task where the historian is involved in a particular *reading* of the given historical material which record the viewpoints and concerns of those who were ruled. From these will have to be inferred the history of those who were ruled. This is no easy task: reconstructing the history of the subaltern classes from the records of elites. It demands the deployment of a number of textual strategies with which historians are not often familiar or comfortable. At yet another level there is the *situating* of this historical material in the given theoretical structure. There has to be, in other words, what Habermas called 'a merger between narrative and theory'. The historian can no longer be satisfied with a simple revival of the narrative, he cannot also jettison the narrative. The craft of the historian demands that he relentlessly pursues the process through which structures change themselves to events and events to structures. This interplay of the diachronic and the synchronic is something that continues to torment the historian, especially of the subaltern classes as he sees his task informed by a definite theoretical import. His narrative may turn out to have a beginning, a middle and an end but not necessarily in that order.

In initiating *Subaltern Studies* the emphasis has justifiably been on resistance as the moment when subaltern consciousness articulates itself against its 'other'. Yet, for large moments of time in

history, within a framework of domination/subordination the subaltern classes may not be actively resisting. There might thus be a difference between the quotidian and the outbursts of active resistance. Or forms of resistance, not immediately visible or articulated, might be imbricated in the quotidian itself. There is a need therefore to look at the commonplace—the structures of everyday life, if you like—if the history of the subaltern classes is to be reconstructed in its totality. Within the quotidian is located the entire question of gender. How certain forms of gender domination are in fact built into the daily lives of subaltern classes, in the very rituals that govern Indian life and in the way labour is divided in the family. The power of patriarchy has thus to be analysed under greater scrutiny. This form of domination opens up the possibility of women forming an alternative solidarity within a community. This is a problematic that has just entered *Subaltern Studies*⁴⁷. There are two other related questions: one, the question of caste and how it operates in subaltern life and consciousness. Indian Marxists have been notoriously chary of the caste question. The two standard responses are to treat it as ideology, a part of the superstructure or to see it as a special form of the material base. The reality of caste is unfortunately more complex. The centrality of power that is inherent in the project of *Subaltern Studies* allows better possibilities of looking at caste. This the *Subaltern Studies* group is yet to take up. Caste leads straight to the question of religion and the way it serves as a bind, a legitimizer of domination as well as a vehicle of rebellion when the dominated perceives something as unjust, a word which in India has definite religious overtones. What exactly is the moral economy of a community? How does one locate its modalities? In Russia when Marx spoke of the country's finest chance to escape the enslavement of capitalism he could readily identify the modalities in the institution of the mir. In India the task is inevitably more complicated in a maze of local practices and ethical codes. All this is really to situate the problem of power, of consciousness within the larger context of culture. This is a large claim and perhaps insuperable by any one group of historians. But the posing of problems in these terms has been made possible because of the *Subaltern Studies* project, in the development of a historiography informed by a critical consciousness.

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19. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
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27. A. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Change in a Northern Indian State, Uttar Pradesh, 1819-1833* (Oxford 1973) pp. 151 and 168ff. Compare this with Bayly's analysis on p. 301 where an emphasis is given on decline in princely consumption.
28. Bayly *ibid.*, p. 262.
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36. R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi 1983) Introduction.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
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43. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-7.
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‘ORGANIZED POLITICS’ AND PEASANT INSURGENCY :
THE BENGAL PROVINCIAL KRISHAK SABHA
AND THE SHARECROPPERS’ STRUGGLE
IN BENGAL, 1946-47

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The publication* which has prompted me to examine the question of the relationship of ‘organized politics’ and peasant insurgency is the latest study on the sharecropping system and the sharecroppers’ struggle in Bengal, including the legendary Tebhaga (1946-47), and arguably the best.

The impressive range of the materials used here include most of the accessible primary sources. Her extensive tours in the major tebhaga areas has enabled her to form a firsthand impression of the society and economy there. She has also talked to a large number of tebhaga activists, including peasants. This forms the basis of many a confident judgement of hers (Inclusion of at least some interviews in the appendix would certainly have greatly added to the value of the book.)

Most studies on the tebhaga have only perfunctorily discussed the complex nature of the sharecropping system and the forms of the pre-tebhaga struggles of the sharecroppers. This study provides

Acknowledgement : A long discussion, in July 1989, with Professor Sunil Sen, a leading Krishak Sabha activist in the tebhaga movement in Dinajpur and the author of the first major study of the movement *Agrarian Struggle in Bengal 1946-47*, has greatly helped me understand what may be called the ‘mentality’ of the participants in the movement and the complexity of its economic and political background. I have learnt most from his vivid recollections of the moments of triumph in the movement, of its predicaments and its eventual collapse. The official reports on the movement, only partially used in this essay since I have not found them much relevant to its theme, mostly present a simplistic version of the movement, describing it as ‘a got-up affair’ and blaming it wholly on the ‘communist agitators’, motivated by short-term political considerations. Sen’s reconstruction of the story of the movement revealed to me areas of rebel activity and perceptions, of which local officers were mostly ignorant.

* Adrienne Cooper, *Sharecropping and Sharecroppers’ Struggles in Bengal, 1930-50* (K. P. Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, 1988)
360 pages, Price Rs. 225.00

a masterly analysis of the multiple roots of sharecroppers' 'dependency relations' and their historical evolution. Cooper's detailed narrative of the earlier phases of the sharecroppers' movement now makes it easier for us to identify the distinctiveness of the tebhaga.

(1)

The best part of the study is, however, that which vividly tells the tebhaga story (1946-47). Our note is mostly concerned with this. We intend to examine, partly on the basis of Cooper's findings, a theme that has long been debated : the relationship of the peasant insurgency and the formal political organization, Bengal Provincial Krishak Sabha (hereafter referred to as KS), which came to be linked with the insurgency. (The general question of the interaction of peasant resistance and 'organized politics' has recently been discussed at length.) The theme is worth examination since till Independence the tebhaga was admittedly the most extensive of the peasant movements in Bengal in which the KS was involved.

The debate centres round several connected questions : (1) How to characterize the KS ? Would it be proper to call it a peasant organization ? (2) On the assumption that the KS had a crucial role to play in the insurgency, how were its priorities determined ? Would it be correct to conclude that the major determinants of the KS decision were mostly external to the local agrarian system and issues ? (3) How did the role of the KS affect the form and course of the peasant insurgency ? Would we argue that the role tended to curb the peasant militancy and thereby eventually weakened the movement ?

(2)

It was Andre Beteille who first raised the first two questions by way of examining the 'important question of the relative strength of the links of the Krishak Sabha with the agrarian social structure'.¹ His formulation of the questions is as follows : ' ... how far is the Krishak Sabha an authentic peasant organization, composed of members belonging to particular agrarian classes and representing their interests as they are perceived by the members of the classes

1. Andra Beteille, *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure* (O.U.P. Delhi, 1974), pp 184-185.

themselves? and how far is it a mere instrument of a political party, managed by party members and guided in one direction or another by a logic of events and a set of priorities which are determined by factors external to the agrarian system?"²

Beteille has not answered the question on the basis of examination of any specific case of peasant insurgency. However, the way he has put the questions suggests that he doubts the authenticity of the KS as a peasant organization and also that he feels the KS decided its priorities, in regard to launching of a peasant movement, according to considerations largely unconnected with the specificity of the peasant question.

On the other hand, some historians of the tebhaga movement, notably Gnanabrata Bhattacharya³ and Sugata Bose⁴, explicitly say that the considerations of the KS in being drawn into the movement were extraneous to the specific compulsions of the sharecroppers' struggle. The KS decision in this regard, Bhattacharya argues, was just imposed on the sharecroppers. Indeed, he would go as far as to say that the movement could be called an 'organized revolt' precisely in the sense that 'the decisions, strategies and tactics' guiding it 'had been conceived by an organizing agency, the BPKS, the peasant front of the CPI, formed and led by members of the CPI'. As a result, the movement 'became susceptible to the dynamics and decisions of those organizations. It was not one of the principles of the Party to let strategic and tactical decisions evolve from below; these were made at the upper (provincial, national) echelons of the Party. The organizers' task was to motivate the peasants to execute them'.⁵ Why was the tebhaga launched at all? 'The decision for tebhaga taken ... barely two months before the revolt began ... was occasioned by national and international concerns of the CPI that were extraneous to both the agrarian system and the organizational preparedness for the revolt. Momentous

2. *Ibid.*

3. Gnanabrata Bhattacharya, 'An Examination of Leadership Entry in Bengal Peasant Revolts', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Issue No. 4, August 1978.

4. Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947*, (Cambridge University Press, 1986), Ch. 8.

5. G. Bhattacharya, op. cit. pp 617-619.

concerns were caused by the expulsions of the CPI from the Congress in 1945; its condemnation by large sections of the Indian public for the wartime collaboration with the British; the fear of losing control of the mass fronts it had forged and penetrated since 1935; expectation of reprisal from the Congress and other non-communist groups; and finally, the pointed rebuff from the CPSU, in their virtually writing off the CPI as ineffective. The peasant revolts and the massive industrial strikes the Party organized in 1946 were, in effect, attempts to reaffirm its hold over the front organizations and warnings to the CPSU, the Congress and Indian public that the CPI was indeed a force to reckon with'.^{5a}

Sugata Bose depends heavily on Bhattacharya in forming his judgement and nearly repeats his view: 'The decision of the communist Party to align itself with the tebhaga agitation ... was an attempt to rehabilitate itself having alienated Indian public opinion because of its wartime collaboration with the British ...'.⁶

How did the involvement of the KS, a supra-local political organization, affect the movement as a whole? About the positive role of the Sabha in its first phase, roughly between November 1946 and the middle of January, 1947, there is a near consensus among historians. However, it is sometimes argued that when the intensification of the landlord counter-offensive forced the sharecroppers to contemplate a more militant posture, in the form of countering violence with violence, the KS leadership faltered. '... the question of arms was a major one on which the Party leadership stood opposed to the revolutionary peasantry', argues Peter Custers.⁷ 'The people and the Party ... also had conflicting attitudes towards the Muslim League government and the colonial state'.⁸ As a result, 'While the masses advanced with full determination and fought boldly, the Party leadership wavered ...'.⁹ The reluctance of the KS to go as far as the peasants wanted crippled the movement: '... the Tebhaga uprising was crumbling, primarily due to the top

5a. *Ibid*, p 619.

6. S. Bose, *op. cit.* pp 264-65.

7. Peter Custers, *Women in the Tebhaga Uprising* (Naya Prakash, Calcutta, 1987), p 103.

8. *Ibid*, p 104.

9. *Ibid*.

leadership itself ! For the leadership had long deserted the movement and had failed to carry it ahead'.¹⁰

(3)

It would be in order to comment first on the question raised by Beteille as to the authenticity of the KS as a peasant organization. The KS did differ from a peasant organization that normally developed in connection with a local peasant movement. The KS was a supralocal organization having concerns other than those which motivated a local peasant organization looking after specific peasant demands of a locality. The KS as it was constituted did include members who did not belong to the peasantry.

These were *formal* differences. However, they did not necessarily mean that the perceptions of the KS and the local peasant organization on agrarian issues and the related question of the strategy of a peasant movement also materially differed. Two things are notable here. First, the KS, being a supralocal organization, might not have been drawn into a peasant movement in the manner in which the local peasant association came to be involved in it. Secondly, even the nature of the local peasant organization changed in the course of the movement which it led and controlled. For instance, new units of the organization emerged. Moreover, new links between the supralocal organization and the local peasant association were forged. The effectiveness of the role of the KS was not determined by its social composition alone. We say more about it later.

10. *Ibid*, p 84. In his study of the post-Independence peasant movements in Bihar (1947-78) Arvind N. Das also concludes that association with 'left parties', such as the CPI and CPI (M), tended to curb the militancy of the spontaneous 'Land Grab' movements of marginal peasants during the 1970's. His conclusion as regards the pre-Independence movements is similar : '... the peasant movement and organization became increasingly embroiled in party politics under the impact of the nationalist movement and the increasing importance of the political parties of other classes. In this process it lost much of its strength from spontaneity by becoming encapsulated within formal party structures'. (Arvind N. Das, 'Agrarian Change from above and below : Bihar 1947-48', in R. Guha (ed) *Subaltern Studies*, II, (O.U.P., Delhi, 1983), p 226. His conclusion as regards the 'Land Grab' movement etc. is as follows : 'when a movement developed spontaneously as it did during the Land Grab phase in the early seventies, an attempt was made to formalise it, with the result that it was smothered in the process' (p 227).

Far more significant is the question of the alleged 'externality' of the KS to the peasant movement that developed, in the sense that the KS decision to be involved in the movement was prompted by its specific political considerations. We may examine in this regard the argument of Bhattacharya and Bose that the Communist Party of India was trying thereby to repair the damage that its 'People's War' policy had caused to its public image.

The logical flaw in the argument is obvious. The war ended in May 1945. The tebhaga started in November 1946. If there was any connection at all between the two phenomena, it was remote and far from decisive. The argument examined here does not clearly say how the C. P. I. had conceived the tebhaga primarily as a political strategy, as a means of redeeming its nationalist credential. The People's War Policy did antagonise a considerable section of nationalist opinion. It is doubtful if by itself it also alienated the peasant masses.¹¹ The People's War Policy was designed to ensure that the British war efforts, particularly the measures toward sustaining the industrial and agricultural production at the desired level, did not suffer at all as a result of any of the political programmes of the C. P. I. The Party did discourage largescale movements of industrial workers or peasants. This scarcely meant that the KS tended to dissociate itself from vital issues concerning them. Even peasant struggles over specific local issues were not altogether given up.

In fact the People's War policy alone did not account for the Party's lack of enthusiasm for broad-based peasant movements. One of the major reasons for this was the devastation caused by the famine of 1943. On the other hand, the Party's keen awareness of the peasant question was amply illustrated by its involvement in the famine relief measures and related activities at the time. It was such activities that enabled the party to establish its widest possible

11. Abani Lahiri, a leading KS activist in the tebhaga movement in Dinajpur, confidently asserted in an 'Interview' (11. 9. 1977.) that the ceaseless denunciation of the CPI by Congress leaders as a 'stooge' (dālāl) of British imperialists rarely influenced the judgement and attitude of the peasant masses. 'Their loyalty to the KS and the CPI remained unshaken throughout.' ('Interview' by Abani Lahiri, *Bartika* (Bengali Journal) Special Tebhaga Issue, July-December, 1987 p 147).

base among the peasantry¹². The removal of the Government ban on the Party (July 1942) had already facilitated increasingly close contacts with the peasantry. The continuing ban on the Congress did indirectly help the Party and the KS consolidate its hold in the villages. In the context of the unprecedented rise in the price of food grains famine relief then constituted the major means of survival for most of the distressed. The most effective relief, of which only a small portion was provided by the Government, was distributed through the numerous units of the CPI and the KS.

The Sabha's activity in this regard did involve political work of a certain kind which helped it establish its image as an unfailing friend of the people. The party activists later recalled how this activity greatly contributed to the sharpening of political consciousness of peasants. The KS was ever on the alert that the available food supply was not cornered by the wily grain-merchants, speculators and hoarders. It persistently carried on elaborate propaganda to make the people aware of the sinister practices of the hoarders. It boldly confronted such enemies of the destitute masses. It was

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12. Literature on the theme is abundant. I would particularly refer to the recollections of the CPI and the KS activists about the work done by them during the Famine. Dhananjay Ray (ed): (1) *Uttar Banger Adhiyar Vidroha O Tebhaga Andolan* (in Bengali). (*The Sharecroppers' Revolt in north Bengal and the tebhaga movement*). (Malda, W. Bengal, 1984); (2) *Rangpurer Adhiyar Vidroha O Tebhaga Andolan* (in Bengali), (*The Sharecroppers' revolt in Rangpur and the tebhaga movement*), Calcutta 1986; (3) *Tarai Duarser Sramik Krishak Vidroha O Tebhaga Andolan* (in Bengali) (*The revolt of the Workers and Peasants in Tarai-Duars and the Tebhaga movement*), Calcutta, 1988.

Abani Lahiri, 'Interview', op. cit. Also Hamza Alavi, 'Peasants and Revolution', in K. Gough and H.P. Sharma, (eds) *Imperialism and Revolution in Asia* (New York, 1973). Alavi concludes: '...many of the unique features of subsequent years which helped the rise of the Tebhaga movement arose as a consequence of the famine' (p 322). One of these 'features' pointed out by him is notable: 'large numbers of students and people from the educated middle classes were drawn into the voluntary relief work during the famine and into largescale medical relief in the following year. This brought about a new contact between the peasantry and educated youth, provided social education for both, and was very important factor in creating new cadres for the Communist Party and the Kishan Sabha'. (p 322).

an altogether novel kind of class conflict in which the KS came to be involved. It organized a special volunteer corps to keep a watch on diversions of the local grain supply by hoarders to more remunerative markets. There were instances where the volunteers stopped carts and lorries stealthily carrying away, mostly after dusk, local food grains¹³. The grains thus held were distributed locally at fair prices. There also were cases where the KS led the local people's raids on secreted grain hoards. As the KS activists later candidly admitted, the KS was reluctant to encourage such raids. It feared such acts of violence might scare the hoarders into further tightening the grain supply. The Sabha of course also considered how the local police backed the hoarders, construing the raids into overt anti-State activities and penalizing its activists and volunteers¹⁴.

The hoarders and other profiteers were not all external agencies, but inevitably included some of the large jotedars of the locality who, through the sharecropping arrangement, came to control, even

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13. A. Cooper has briefly narrated one of the instances that occurred in the Khanpur village of Dinajpur. (p 145). Kali Sarkar, a KS activist of the movement in Dinajpur, recollects the episode in considerable detail, which points to the changing power relations in the village. The leader of the local resistance was Chiyar Shai Shek, an agricultural labourer then in the employ of the powerful jotedar of the locality, Asit Mohan Sinha Ray. The jotedar sought to induce him in various ways to desert the peasant cause, but failed. It was Chiyar's boldness that foiled the jotedar's plan of sending away the local paddy to the famous grain mart Hili, Dhananjoy Ray (ed), the book marked (1) in Footnote No. 12 ; pp 92-94. Also see Manikrishna Sen's recollection of a similar episode included in the book marked (2) in Footnote No. 12 ; pp 3-4.
 14. The bias of the local police in favour of jotedars/hoarders was, however, inconsistent with the general attitude of the local administration to hoarders at the time. Alavi observes : '... following the famine the Kishan Sabha renewed its drive against hoarders and black marketeers of food with vigour. Now its hands were stronger inasmuch as the authorities also began to view the activities of the hoarders with a fresh concern because of the magnitude of the famine as well as the fact that in the spring and summer of 1944 the Japanese had invaded Assam and parts of East Bengal. The jotedar, who had food to hoard and sell on the black market, could no longer count on the connivance of the authorities.' (Hamza Alavi, *op. cit.*, p 322).

in normal times, a considerable part of the grain supply. The anti-hoarding drive of the KS thus reinforced the existing bitterness of sharecroppers against jotedars, at least to the extent that it enabled sharecroppers to identify new forms and attributes of their antagonistic relations with their class enemies. On the other hand, as a KS activist later recalled, peasants came to regard the KS as 'their own organization'.¹⁵

(4)

The emphasis in the argument of Beteille, Bhattacharya and Bose on an alleged political motivation behind the KS involvement in the tebhaga tends to ignore the concrete agrarian background in which the tebhaga and the KS role in it had come about, and the struggling sharecroppers accepted the role and relied on it. The argument creates an impression that the KS had only a tenuous connection with the earlier struggles of the sharecroppers, that it had rather abruptly arrived on the scene and that the sharecroppers were merely carrying out the decision of the KS.

We intend to examine the argument with particular reference to the following questions: What led the sharecroppers to the war path, so that a movement, admittedly the most extensive and the best organized in the recent years¹⁶, emerged within a period of three to four months? How did the KS become involved in the movement? Whichever the way the involvement had come about why did the sharecroppers continue to look for the KS for advice and leadership? Was the KS role of such a kind as to preclude the initiative of the rebels in regard to the strategy of coping with the counter-offensive of their mighty enemies?

Numerous recent developments directly affecting the sharecroppers provide a clue to an understanding of the beginning of the movement.

15. Vide Footnote No. 11, p. 147.

16 We examine later the following conclusion of S. Bose: '... the 1946-47 sharecroppers' movement was limited in its spread and intensity and never assumed the massive proportion that current tebhaga mythology would have us believe.' (S. Bose, op. cit. p 271).

We first examine two interpretations of such developments. Both seem to argue from an implicit assumption that it was a sense of power that prompted the sharecroppers to confront the jotedars. Hamza Alavi¹⁷ partly explains this alleged sense of power by two developments : scarcity of labour resulting from the unprecedented famine mortality, which placed the jotedars in a position of disadvantage ; secondly, expansion of employment opportunities because of the war situation, which by reducing the dependence of sharecroppers on their barga leases tended to strengthen their bargaining position.

Scarcity of labour and the rising commodity prices did necessitate an increase in money wages. However, as Dhanagare has shown¹⁸, sharecroppers scarcely benefited by this change. In general the validity of Alavi's argument is conditional upon the supposition that the magnitude of the fall in the labour supply was such as to disorganize the system of barga cultivation, so that the sharecroppers, now aware of the jotedars' predicament, could drive a hard bargain. We do not have adequate statistics to establish this supposition. Nor do contemporary reports suggest that jotedars, facing the situation arising out of a sharp drop in the labour supply, were obliged to revise the usual barga terms as a means of retrieving the lost cultivation. On the other hand, the available evidence all supports the widespread contemporary impression that the material conditions of the sharecroppers had been steadily deteriorating in the recent years and that they had been facing new assaults from the jotedars. We would resume this argument later.

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17. H. Alavi argues : 'During the famine more sharecroppers had died than peasants of any other class, because they had the least reserves with which to get through the famine. Apart from the millions who died, large numbers had drifted to towns and cities in search of work and food and did not come back. The reduction in their numbers created a relative shortage of labour. The invasion of Assam and parts of East Bengal by the Japanese and the consequent largescale military operations in the region also opened up alternative avenues of employment for sharecroppers. Their bargaining position vis-a-vis the jotedars was strengthened.' (H. Alavi, op. cit., p. 323).
 18. D. N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India, 1920-1950* (O.U.P Delhi 1983), pp 161-162.

According to the second interpretation¹⁹ the first initiative for the anti-jotedar resistance came from the relatively big adhiars, who sought thereby to prevent jotedars from appropriating the full benefits of the rising prices of rice.

The size of barga holdings did widely vary from place to place, and it would be wrong to hold that all the adhiars were destitute cultivators. This qualification applies particularly to some Northern districts, such as Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur. Adhiars of recent origins were mostly dwarf holders. However, of the traditional adhiars who had rented lands at a time when reclamable waste land was abundant, some at least did possess big holdings and because of the long duration of their uninterrupted tenancies they were customarily treated as peasants having secure titles in the rented lands. They were naturally eager to retain part of the gains from the rising prices. This they could do by reducing the jotedars' share of harvest. However, in the context of the rising agricultural prices, hoarding as a device for maximizing profit from rice trade became increasingly attractive to jotedars and they were as naturally keen that they continued to receive their customary share of the produce. Hence the frequency of their clashes with their ambitious adhiars.

However, there is no evidence that the tebhaga movement owed its beginning to the latter's initiative. The main strength of the movement was undoubtedly the petty bargadars, whose number had recently considerably increased, nearly everywhere. Hence the extra-ordinary rapidity of the spread of the movement.

It would, therefore, be in order to trace the major developments in the recent years which tended to heighten the antagonism between

19. Sugata Bose, *op. cit.* Bose's argument refers to the 1939-40 phase of the sharecroppers' struggle as well as to the tebhaga. His observation on the 1939-40 phase: 'The first class-based challenge to the jotedars' power in north Bengal in 1939-40 was ... led by the small jotedar-cum-adhiars and adhiars who sharecropped fairly large operational holdings in the grain-exporting districts of Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri. They aimed principally at gaining a more direct access to and better terms in the rising product market' (p. 253). His conclusion in regard to the tebhaga: 'As in 1939, the initiative was taken by the bigger adhiars who were eager to benefit from the high postwar level of agricultural prices.' (p. 263).

the two classes. The question whether the relatively substantial adhiyars took the initiative in the anti-jotedar resistance may be considered in the light of the earlier phases of the resistance of sharecroppers.

The forms and intensity of the growing anti-jotedar bitterness in various places of course depended partly on the structure of the pre-existing relations of the two classes there. We would avoid the local variations and indicate only the general features.

We begin with the onset of the Great Depression and end with the devastating famine of 1943-44.

The collapse of agricultural prices inevitably added to the real burden of peasant debt. Peasants initially reacted to the sharp fall in their income resulting from the long duration of the price crash, by adopting rigorous economy measures²⁰. Borrowing as a whole could thus be minimized. To the extent that peasants succeeded in unitedly resisting the pressure for debt repayment they could also partially reduce their debt burden²¹. Moreover, since the crash of all commodity prices, including those of land, discouraged purchases of peasant holdings now on sale on grounds of defaults of rent or debt, the extent of peasant dispossession was much less than what the amount of the defaults would normally have caused.

However, such reliefs were mostly temporary. Historians have

20. B. B. Chaudhuri, 'The process of depeasantization in Bengal and Bihar, 1885-1947', *The Indian Historical Review*, July 1975, Section D.

The 'Tour Diary' of F. O. Bell when he was supervising the 'Survey and Settlement' operations in the district of Dinajpur (1934-1940), is an excellent source of information on the question. For Bengali translation of part of the *Diary, Bartika*, July-December 1987: Special Tebhaga Issue, pp 126-144.

21. B. B. Chaudhuri, *Ibid.* Bell also notes the role of the recently established Debt Settlement Boards in encouraging deliberate defaults in the payment of debt and rent. Dr. Ratanlal Chakravarti shows how the Debt Settlement Boards, originally designed to reduce the debt burden of cultivators, were mostly used by helpless moneylenders to salvage as much of the credit they had provided as possible under the circumstances when they found it a hard job to realise the debt. (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Dhaka University (1988) entitled "Rural Indebtedness in Bengal; 1935-1947", chs V-VI.

analysed how the Depression eventually resulted in the marginalization of a sizeable group of petty farmers through causing loss of their holdings and also in the reinforcement of their dependency relations of various forms. Peasants desperately sought to minimize borrowing, but could scarcely do without borrowing under the circumstances. As a result, in the context of the shrinking credit supply and also of the reduced credit-worthiness of peasants, money-lenders' terms for any kind of lending now were naturally far more stringent. This happened particularly where professional money-lenders, not finding it worthwhile any longer to continue lending out of a feeling of uncertainty about debt realization, yielded place to new creditors, including affluent peasants in the locality. Their methods of debt realization did not immediately include dispossession of indebted clients from their lands as long as the Depression continued, but they were far from merciful. Indeed, the hard terms of their lending and the strengthening of the peasants' dependency relations with them is evident from the fact that it was to them that peasants mostly lost their holdings. The process of alienation of peasant holdings was in general facilitated by the new laws of 1935 and 1940 by which such alienations ceased to be conditional on the payment of certain fees to local zamindars²². This was partly the reason why the end of the Depression brought little relief to indebted peasants, since creditors or zamindars now sought to enforce their claims. Moreover, the war economy created conditions for some groups to make quick fortunes. In the context of a nearly dried-up market in zamindari estates, they now transferred a considerable part of their earnings to purchases of ryoti holdings. Both affluent peasants and wealthy non-agriculturists, including a sizeable group of strangers to the peasant society, could consolidate their position during the period of the famine, when an unprecedented number of distress sales, often of entire peasant holdings, occurred. Even in normal times most alienees of peasant holdings avoided direct cultivation. Rising commodity prices, including wages, during the famine and afterwards, made direct cultivation far less attractive. In view of the prospects of an increasing income from the artificially manipulated trade in hoarded food-grains the

22. Cooper, pp 38-40, for the provisions of the two Acts: Bengal Agricultural Debtors Act (1935) and Bengal Moneylenders Act (1940).

arrangement with the destitute sharecroppers proved an effective device for controlling a sizeable part of the local grain supply.

The most striking feature, then, of the small peasant society during the period of about a decade and a half preceding the tebhaga was the steady immiserization of a considerable section of sharecroppers. The existence of a small number of relatively big adhiyars scarcely altered the nature of class relations under the bargadari system, and the strength of sharecroppers' struggles largely derived from the mobilization of small bargadars.

(5)

The anti-jotedar resistance was far from a recent phenomenon. It would be appropriate here to trace how the KS came to influence it in the decade preceding Independence.

The available evidence relating to its earlier phases is rather scanty. Still, it is possible to indicate some of their distinctive features. The earlier movements were mostly localized, except during the country-wide debate (1926-28) over the Government proposal to regard sharecroppers as tenants worthy of legal protection. Secondly, these struggles were often closely associated with 'organized politics', particularly 'Muslim politics'. As a result, though their class origins were undoubted, the articulation of class antagonism had a pronounced 'communal' tinge. At least the official reports leave such an impression.²³ The fact that the landowners were often Hindus probably influenced the reactions of Muslim sharecroppers. For instance, the latter would often vent their bitterness against their adversaries by branding them as 'Hindu landlords'. Official reports often pointed out how, as a result, 'communal passions were roused'. In any case, the slogans 'Hindu landlords', 'Saha (a Hindu trading group) landlords' did help mobilization of Muslim sharecroppers. Thirdly, their sense of solidarity as a community perhaps influenced one of the rebel programmes. For instance, Muslim bargadars vowed not to cultivate the lands of Hindu landowners till their major demands were conceded. Where

23. The rest of this passage and the next two passages are based on Cooper, pp 114-118.

the landowners got betelnut grown by their bargadars, the vow was not to consume betelnut at all.

On the other hand, the Santal sharecroppers of Malda, who had recently come under the influence of Hinduism and 'Hindu politics', betrayed during their movement (1932) strong feelings against the Muslim landowners. Moslems were denied entry to the Adina Mosque which the Santals temporarily occupied and refused to leave 'because they believed that if they held the Mosque their grievances would be redressed'.²⁴

Organized politics of other kinds such as that of the Congress and the Krishak Proja Party, also had a role in the organization of sharecroppers' movements. However, a striking feature of the involvement of the two organizations was that the initiative in this came from the radical members, often in defiance of the express directive of the central leadership of the parties. The Congress did involve poor peasants in agitations, but it 'remained unable to accommodate their specific interests for fear of alienating their supporters among the rural elite'.²⁵ The Krishak Proja Party, too, 'despite the intentions of its more radical organizers, remained primarily a party of the richer sections of rural society'. 'Both organizations were unable to redress sharecroppers' grievances, because they represented wider interests'. As a result, sharecroppers' struggles tended to be delinked from the mainstreams of organized politics which the Congress and the KPP represented. Withdrawal of the support of these resourceful political organizations from the bargadars' struggles, tended to weaken their strength.

Whatever the role of 'organized politics,' the objectives of these struggles were largely determined by the specific class position of the bargadars, the pattern of their economic subordination and the wide variety of their dependency relations. During periods of short-term rises in agricultural prices, bargadars wanted the landlords' share reduced. In fact the demand that this share should be reduced to one-third was voiced long before the historic *tebhaga* was

24. Ibid, p. 117. Also Tanika Sarkar, 'Jitu Sanyal's Movement in Malda, 1924-32: A Study in Tribal Protest', in R. Guha (ed) *Subaltern Studies*, IV (O.U.P. Delhi, 1986).

25. Cooper, p. 125.

launched. In other times, sharecroppers' demands had some common features : abolition of various abwabs, reduction of the usual interest charges and division of the crop at a neutral place instead of the landlord's courtyard.

(6)

It was the increasing involvement of KS activists since about 1937 in the intensifying agitations of bargadars that gradually transformed the character of the anti-jotedar resistance. The study of this interaction is relevant since it makes intelligible the nature of the KS role in the tebhaga.

The KS did not initially have a consistent strategy for mobilising the sharecroppers around their specific class demands. It then regarded the zamindar-ryot antagonism as the primary contradiction in the agrarian society. Its programme for reshaping the rural agrarian structure therefore mainly insisted on the abolition of the zamindari system. However, the reason why the Congress and the KPP leaderships were not keen on taking a consistently active role in bargadars' struggles was different from that which accounted for the limited enthusiasm of the KS for this kind of political mobilization. In the case of the Congress and the KPP a decisive factor was their social composition, particularly the presence there of sizeable groups which represented the interests of landlords and affluent peasants. In the case of the KS it was a question of interpreting the precise nature of the existing social formations and rural class antagonisms. It had also something to do with the limited organizational strength of the KS. In both these respects notable changes gradually occurred.

A source of strength for the KS organization was the release of political prisoners (after the Government of India Act of 1935 had come into force), a considerable number of whom had been converted to the communist faith while in jail. The new Congress plan of 'mass contact' created for them a forum for coming into close contact with poor peasants, including sharecroppers. It was the widening stir among sharecroppers themselves that gradually awoke the KS to the stark reality of their distress and brought about a sharp change in the Sabha's political orientation.

This new awareness of the agrarian scene was evident from the enthusiastic participation of the KS in the leading bargadari struggles in the late thirties²⁶. The agitations, covering, even before the beginning of the war, an extensive area—24 Parganas, Midnapur, Howrah, Mymensingh, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur—were largely determined by the crucial changes in the sharecroppers' position during the Depression and the broad trends in the post-Depression rural economy.

A leading role in the agitations was that of the petty farmers who lost their lands because of non-payment of rent and debt during the difficult Depression days. When the Depression began to lift and farm prices improved, some landlords and creditors thought it more sensible to replace impecunious cultivators by more resourceful ones. Some agitations of the time were aimed against this sinister move. The dispossessed forcibly cultivated their lands and in some cases carried away the paddy. Most agitations were, however, designed to force landowners to alter the terms of barga leases in bargadars' favour, in the context of the improving agricultural prices. In some cases (as in Mymensingh) even the legitimacy of the barga system was questioned. The demand was the substitution of money rent for produce rent. Most sharecroppers were not, however, as daring and merely wanted better conditions within the framework of the system. The obligation on the part of sharecroppers to part with a fixed amount of rent, whatever the state of the crop, had always galled them. (Such was the nature of the *tanka* system of Mymensingh and the *Kut* system of Howrah.) It proved a still more grievous burden under conditions of rising farm prices. The sharecroppers here wanted the system replaced by one where the quantity of the produce to be surrendered would vary with the size of the actual harvest. Where the variable quantity had traditionally been fixed at one half

26. Copper, pp 134-140. Recollections of the CPI and the KS activists invariably point out the continuity of the contacts thus established with peasants till the time of the tebhaga. Some of the core organizations, such as the Volunteer force, presumably became defunct soon after the end of the struggles. However, experiences of peasant participants in this regard were greatly helpful when such organizations had to be built during the tebhaga. Vide Footnote No. 12.

of the actual produce sharecroppers now wanted their share raised to two-thirds. The demand for *tebhaga* was thus voiced even before the beginning of the second World War. Sharecroppers had often felt how the system of crop division had been abused by landowners when the division took place in their farmyard. Such in fact had been the normal practice where the landowners were not absentees and felt powerful enough to dictate the *barga* terms to sharecroppers. Bargadars now insisted that the produce be divided in a neutral place or in the common village yard (*Daser Kholan*). The Depression created conditions where the traditional ethical norm of 'sanctity of debt' continued to be violated. Though several professional moneylenders stopped lending altogether, the peasants' credit ties were eventually reinforced, the more so in the case of dwarf holders and petty sharecroppers. An objective of the sharecroppers' struggles was reduction of the debt burden and liberalization of the credit terms. They now demanded that no interest should be charged for seed loans and that the traditional interest charge of 50% on consumption loans be considerably reduced.

Sharecroppers also widely participated in the broad-based struggle, against collection of *tola* on all sales at the local *hats* (markets) and occasional fairs. Here too the KS had a leading role.²⁷ Of the sellers sharecroppers did constitute a sizeable section. Owners of the hats too were also in several cases their direct landlords, or persons holding leases of the hats from them. The levies inevitably hit more the small producers like sharecroppers than relatively affluent traders or peasants, and the levies were more indiscriminately imposed and collected where the temporary leaseholders controlled the collection.

The technique of the struggle was collective refusal of the levies, particularly of those which were normally considered oppressive. The hat owners invariably relied on the local police to tame the defiant sellers and their leaders, mostly the local KS volunteers. The KS was evidently keen that a direct encounter with the police

27: One of the best accounts of the role in Rangpur is the recollection of Sudhir Mukherjee, a KS activist. Vide Footnote No. 12, the book marked (2); pp 36-49,

was avoided and one of the devices to frustrate the hat owners was to persuade the sellers to move on to a different place outside the owners' control. This meant setting up altogether new markets, and it was the KS writ that ran there. The KS issued formal receipts for the sale transactions. This happened particularly in the case of the big kali fair, which, held once a year, continued for a month. The owners of hats and fairs were thus forced to come to a compromise. For instance, the levy on account of issue of sale receipts was abolished.

While the role of the KS strengthened the sharecroppers' struggles, its participation in the struggles enriched its own understanding of the complexity of the rural agrarian scene. This is evident from its analysis of rural class relations in the memorandum it issued soon after the beginning of the war. It, for the first time, emphatically stated that sharecroppers should not any longer be treated as cultivators having no legal right whatsoever in the lands they cultivated and that their share of the produce should be 62.5%, instead of the customary 50%. It was this awareness of the changing rural situation that determined its strategy in regard to the bargadars' agitations till about the middle of 1941. Two main reasons prevented the KS from having a wider role in these agitations : Government ban on its open political activity till July-August 1942 and its own limited organizational strength.

(7)

It has been argued that the C.P.I.'s People's War stand increasingly isolated the KS from the peasantry and thereby weakened the bargadars' agitations. The CPI was cautious that an open class conflict might impede the British war efforts, particularly the preparations against the growing Japanese menace. A largescale peasant movement, the Party feared, might prevent resourceful zamindars and other landowners from actively assisting the mobilization against the Japanese. Needless to say, in general the KS ceased to be enthusiastic about organizing peasant struggles. Bargadars themselves did not show much enthusiasm either to unite on their own against their landlords.

The relative lull in the bargadars' agitations had, however, much

to do with the devastating famine. Things were then falling apart. It was a time of unprecedented distress, abrupt immiserization of a vast multitude and dislocation in the peasant social organization, with the crisis-stricken cultivators frantically looking for means of subsistence outside agriculture. It would have been a grievous folly on the part of the KS to try then to mobilize the famished for a class war. The most vital question of the time was making food available to them.

On the other hand, the famine itself created conditions for the KS and the CPI to restore effective contacts with peasants, which the Party's war policy tended to limit. We have argued this point earlier.²⁸

Where the KS had already built up its stable bases, as in Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri, the famine relief activity inevitably shaded off into political activities of a distinctive class orientation,²⁹ apart from the ones we have described above. The Sabha soon realized how the exactions of moneylenders and landlords aggravated the people's misery, nullified the benefits of its relief activities and retarded the process of recovery even where relatively more resourceful peasants could withstand the initial impact of the famine. There the Sabha actively backed the sharecroppers' demand that repayment of loans be allowed without any interest and that the rate of interest should not by any means exceed 25%.

Another KS activity at the time, its involvement in the 'Grow more food' campaign, was far less effective in regard to establishment of its links with poor peasants and bargadars. This was at least partly because of the limited success of its efforts. The KS initiative was noticeable mainly in two spheres: encouraging cultivators to reclaim fallow lands and involving them in the work of constructing embankments and irrigation channels. Reclaiming waste lands had its legal difficulties. Apart from these, lands lay waste despite the intensifying population pressure of the time largely because reclaiming them required a considerable capital input, which was not easily available. Embankments and irrigation channels

28. Vide Section 3.

29. Cooper, pp 144-46.

involved, understandably, a much larger investment. Even where it could be provided it was often found that the real beneficiaries were relatively well-to-do peasants having big holdings. Even the limited gains of petty farmers and sharecroppers were sometimes offset where zamindars violated the conditions of the initial agreement stipulating liberal terms of rent etc. for sharecroppers without whose voluntary labour the embankments could not have been constructed.

(8)

Sharecroppers' struggles since about the end of the Depression thus came to be increasingly linked with the KS. This was at least partly because of the peripherality of the role of the Congress and the KPP in these struggles, except occasionally. Not that the KS initiated the struggles, but it is doubtful if the struggles in their various forms could have developed to the extent that they did without the firm links with the KS. The links, so far as the struggles were concerned, tended to be somewhat tenuous as a result of the CPI's People's War policy. However, they were restored, widened and consolidated during the famine. In some cases the KS's famine relief had overt political forms, which became increasingly pronounced since an aftermath of the famine and some related developments was the abrupt increase in the number of marginal farmers and sharecroppers.

The KS involvement in the struggles had also a role in ridding them of the sectarian communal overtones which tended to characterise the earlier struggles from time to time. The persistence of communal element was particularly noticeable in those places where the KS base was rather weak. As we shall later, this was a complex phenomenon, having much to do with the recent trends in the complicated relationship of the two major political organizations of the country, the Congress and the Muslim League. To this complexity the CPI's own misjudgement of the relationship contributed not a little.

(9)

The fact that the KS had already been a decisive force in the pre-tebhaga struggles of sharecroppers suggests that its commitment

to the tebhaga need not be explained purely in terms of its political programmes unconnected with the specific issue of sharecropping. This suggested line of reasoning is strengthened by the well-known fact that it was not the KS that initiated the movement and mobilized the local sharecroppers around demands formulated by itself. The Sabha did not have any plan whatsoever, even barely two months before the beginning of the tebhaga, that it would soon be involved in the most extensive of the sharecroppers' struggles. Indeed, it scarcely foresaw, even when it formally committed itself to the movement, that the movement would spread like a wildfire over a large part of the province. Apart from anything else, it was unsure of its organizational strength beyond certain areas.

Since some KS activists did admit³⁰ that its decision in favour of its involvement in the tebhaga was influenced by a political consideration it would be relevant to analyse its nature and to examine if this consideration supports the supposition that the CPI had its specific political interests to promote through participation in the movement. The consideration was an honest belief that a peasant struggle carried on a distinct class line would help to fight the growing communal menace following the communal holocaust of August 1946. Sunil Sen notes the bearing of this phenomenon on the KS resolution supporting the tebhaga: 'Communal riot appeared to be the dominant feature of Indian politics; democratic movement was in a shambles. In this grim background Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha gave the call for tebhaga struggle in September 1946'. Another participant recalls how they believed that the 'people's struggle' would 'change the climate of rioting'.³¹ 'At the time everybody could expect that communal riots would engulf the whole nation. Then the idea of Tebhaga was taken up and we found a new heaven in the villages'.³²

What was then uppermost in the minds of the KS leaders was the realization that the spread of the communal virus would before long cripple all democratic movements and the pervasive anti-

30. Sunil Sen, *op cit.* p. 36.

31. The observation is quoted in Peter Custers, *op cit.* p. 80.

32. *ibid.*

imperialist struggle of the time. This concern was then widely shared, though the perceptions as to the right means of eliminating communalism varied. The CPI decision was not based on any shrewd calculation of any specific gains as a political party from the tebhaga struggle.

(10)

The alleged political motivations behind the KS involvement in the tebhaga were thus not-existent. The major political consideration, which we have noted above, i.e. the idea that an organized peasant struggle would be the most effective antidote to the poison of communalism, was not of the kind which the usual interpretations of the KS motives suppose.

In fact, as we have pointed out above, the sharecroppers' agitations had already started in some parts of north Bengal. The KS merely responded to it. However, the arrival of the KS was far from an abrupt one. Its earlier involvements in the various forms of sharecroppers' struggles did facilitate the response. The tebhaga demand itself was not a novel one. The only difference was that now it was more insistent, at least partly because of the expectation of a bumper rice harvest over an extensive area. The fact that the movement started in those areas where the KS had already built its bases is suggestive.³³ This is also true of the areas where the movement spread initially.

33. Sushil Sen, a leading KS activist, recalls : 'The famine-stricken Atwari-Baliadangi area was the one where the Party (CPI) and the Krishak Samiti had its strongest base. It was decided that the movement would be initiated there. The responsibility was entrusted to me'. Sushil Sen, '*Tebhagar Larai*' (The Tebhaga Struggle), *Parichay*, March 1989, p. 8. The narrative of Sunil Sen, another KS activist in Dinajpur, corroborates it : 'In November (1946) the Kisan Sabha began preparations for the tebhaga struggle. Sushil Sen went to Rampur village in Atwari police station to start the movement. Presumably, Rampur was expected to serve as an example to other villages. The Kisan Sabha which was centred in Rampur had established village level committees throughout Atwari ; it was a centre of the adhiyar struggle of 1939. The leaders of the struggle. Ramlal Singh, Pathal Singh, Rajen Singh, came from the contiguous Balia village ... Sushil Sen held a baithak attended by about one hundred Kisan leaders, and the decision of launching the struggle was taken.' Sunil Sen, *Op, cit*, p. 37.

The crucial question, therefore, is the precise nature of the KS role in the growth and organization of the movement. The point needs to be stressed in view of the stress in some studies of the movement⁸⁴ on the so-called element of spontaneity in it. The notion of spontaneity is primarily based on the assessment of the manner in which the movement has started, i.e. non-existence of any role of the KS or any other organized political party in initiating the movement. Its changing shape and organization later tends to be ignored in the charactersization of the movement as a spontaneous one. The manner in which the changes came about implied that the movement ceased to be spontaneous in the sense in which the term is used. The major changes were as follows. Initiating the movement on their own the rebel sharecroppers increasingly relied on the KS leadership. Where the jotedari authority virtually collapsed the sharecroppers tended to regard the KS organization as the only legitimate authority in the village. Rarely did they seek to establish their own hegemonic control. The hold of a rival political organization, the Muslim League, on the sharecroppers in some places was only marginally connected with its role in their movement, since the role was usually insignificant. The hold was because of the appeal of the idea of Pakistan which the Muslim League then propounded. Even where the KS strategy was not quite consistent with the aspirations of sharecroppers, particularly in the context

The first bunch of paddy plant was cut by Sushil Sen amidst lusty shouting of slogans, *Inqilab Zindabad* (Long Live the Revolution) by the KS volunteers, with the Red Flags of the CPI fluttering all around. Sushil Sen, *op. cit.*

34. Peter Custers harps on the argument that the 'Party-Top' had no 'conscious planning', so that 'the course of action was decided by local cadres and the masses'. Peter Custers, *op. cit.* p. 73. He concludes: 'The provincial leadership ultimately agreed on some sort of compromise between its own reticence and the decidedness of these activists: in a selected number of districts peasant struggles would be started on an experimental basis and with moderate slogans, but everybody went ahead doing experiments and made preparations for struggle.' (p. 74) The element of 'spontaneity' is here inferred from the alleged indecisiveness of the Provincial leadership. The admission that the KS activists did have a crucial role in initiating the movement is inconsistent with the notion of spontaneity. Sugata Bose also insufficiently stresses the role of the local KS.

of the intensifying counter-offensive of their adversaries, they seldom looked for an alternative leadership. Only in rare cases did they flout the KS directives in this regard. The eventual collapse of the movement was also largely due to circumstances which the KS could not control on its own.

(11)

In fact even prior to the formal approval of the tebhaga by the provincial leadership of the KS the local KS activists had been connected with the first stir among the sharecroppers. The formal rules of the KS seldom precluded such initiative on the part of the local activists provided it remained consistent with the objectives of the KS.⁸⁵ In fact the provincial leadership scarcely ever sought to 'control' the movement. Its emphasis throughout was on the crucial role of the bargadars themselves in carrying their struggle forward.⁸⁶

The KS resolution endorsing the tebhaga stand of the local activists inevitably called for an altogether new role for them. The role had two major forms : clarifying to sharecroppers the central issues relating to the tebhaga demand, particularly to those who had not

35. According to the 'instructions' of the All India Kisan Sabha (listed in the *Kisan Handbook*, 1938) the local activists 'will have the right to choose their own practical line of action in close conformity with the spirit underlying these instructions, but in harmony with the local circumstances from time to time.' Quoted in Cooper, p. 134.
36. Krishna Binod Ray's pamphlet in Bengali *Laraier Kaida* (The Proper Technique of carrying on the peasant struggle), published by the Bengal Provincial Krishak Sabha in January 1947, repeatedly stresses the point. Ray reiterates the stand of the BPKS on the tebhaga demand : 'Push on to achieve the tebhaga demand relying on the strength of your own struggle'. (*Nijeder laraier jore*). Since, argues Ray, the legal and administrative systems were designed to prop up 'imperialist exploitation', it would be far from easy to get the State formally to recognise the legitimacy of the peasant demand. The new law could be written only with 'the blood of countless peasants'; the victory could be 'wrested only through struggle'. Ray repeats the view in connection with the task of organizing the Volunteer Corps : 'A strong volunteer corps has to be built right now. The task should not by any means be left to non-peasant educated cadres. Peasants themselves must take it on to organize the peasant volunteer corps'. (Translations mine).

yet firmly committed themselves to the new struggle ; secondly, building up the right organization for carrying on the struggle and for coping with the inevitable counter-offensive of the mighty adversaries.

The major issues connected with the tebhaga demand, which the Krishak Samities, old and new, explained to the sharecroppers through leaflets, posters, speeches in the local market places and mosques, were the changing land system in Bengal over the years, the origins and growth of sharecropping arrangements of different kinds, the elements of exploitation in the barga system in general, the sheer iniquity of the expropriation by jotedars of the crop that should rightfully belong to cultivating sharecroppers, the recent developments contributing to the exploitation and the organic links between the iniquitous land system and the overall imperialist domination.³⁷ Krishak Samities were careful throughout to regard the tebhaga struggle not as a mere local issue but as part of the wider anti-imperialist struggle.

Organizing the Tebhaga struggle was of course a far more arduous task. It became increasingly so with the rapid spread of the movement. The struggle was predicated on the assumption that jotedars would not willingly concede the tebhaga demand and that it had to be won through a united struggle. The demand looks simple, but it threatened to hurt deeply the economic and social position of the jotedars, particularly when the movement did not remain any longer confined to the question of reducing the jotedar's share in the crop. Even the original demand itself frightened the jotedars in the context of the sharply rising grain prices and of the vastly increased opportunities then for profiteering from trade in hoarded grain. However, the demand in the form in which it was pressed constituted a direct assault on the local authority of jotedars. The sharecroppers now insisted on the division of the harvest in a neutral place or in their own yards, since the usual practice of division in the jotedar's courtyard was often grossly abused by him in order to enforce many a unjust claim of his, claims rooted in the complex dependency relations of sharecroppers with their jotedars. Discontinuation of the traditional practice of crop division thus

37. *ibid.*

amounted to disputing the illegal claims of jotedars and also, inevitably, questioning the legitimacy of the dependency relations. Jotedars were all the more resentful of this encroachment on their authority, since the authority was now being supplanted by that of a well-knit political organization, the Kishan Sabha.

The specific nature of the immediate issue of the struggle itself i.e. forcibly carrying of the entire harvest to the common village yard or to the bargadars' *kholans*, called for a particular kind of organization. The success of the movement largely depended on the promptness with which the harvesting could be done and the crop removed to the *panchayet khamar*. Agricultural operations like transplanting and harvest created, even in normal times, a severe pressure on the local labour supply and obliged peasants to hire additional labour or to devise a system of mutual help, so that peasant families worked on each other's lands according to a strict time schedule. The urgency of the harvesting was far greater now since any delay in this regard might enable jotedars to find out means of frustrating the rebel bargadars.³⁸ The difficulties for the Krishak Samities were all the greater in districts like Dinajpur where cultivation on the sharecropping system was often not done on scattered and petty holdings, but on large compact blocks of land. Carrying the paddy to the *panchayet khamar* too had to be finished methodically and quickly. Moreover, a strict watch had to be kept on the produce thus gathered. Jotedars' musclemen intending to force their entry into the *khamar* had to be scared off. Even petty pilferages had to be prevented so that disputes among sharecroppers themselves could be checked as far as possible.

All these required careful planning involving the coordination of innumerable peasant families. The KS had a prominent role to play in this regard. New units of Krishak Samities came up. The old defunct ones were revived. Volunteer forces were created for the purposes of prompt harvesting and defence. Cultivators were continually warned of jotedars' counter-attacks. They were urged to carry along *lathis* (long sticks), which now had acquired a

38. The uncompromising jotedars planned to recruit non-local labour on a scale big enough for finishing the harvesting without any dependence on bargadars. *Ibid.*

symbolical significance. An elaborate warning system was devised. Peasants were thus ever on the alert against the arrival of the police force or of jotedars' hirelings.

(12)

The struggle for tebhaga thus became transformed into a wider struggle for power. The question was simply not whether jotedars would concede the tebhaga demand, but whether their entrenched authority structure in the village would persist or not.^{38a} It was in this light that the rebel bargadars increasingly regarded their struggle. This was altogether a new element in the sharecroppers' agitations. Dhanagare's emphasis on the 'limited' nature of the tebhaga demand as a major reason of the failure of the movement to grow beyond a certain point seems misplaced.³⁹ The essentially economic struggle shaded off before long into a political struggle. The initial success in this strengthened the links with the KS which had a decisive role in planning the strategy of the movement.

38a. The Subdivisional Officer of Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, thus described the transformation : '... the whole movement had overshot its mark. Originally confined to economic adjustment between landlords and bargadars it took a lawless turn later on'. Bargadars now regarded the Krishak Sabha as the sole legitimate authority in the locality. The Subdivisional Officer analysed the institutional basis of this alternative authority : 'The movement in Baliadangi, Atwari and Birganj police stations indulged in economic boycott of non-communists, specially the landlords. The hat and market goers were not allowed to make sales or purchases unless they had one-anna-Communist Party membership ticket. It is reported that in Baliadangi and Birganj police stations parallel government was tried to be set up by the communists with courts and thanas of their own and in Baliadangi one jotedar's family was forcibly kidnapped from house to stand trial before such a court' ('Secret' report on the tebhaga, dated 10 March, 1947. Land and Land Revenue Department, Land Revenue Branch, File No. 6M-38/47, 8 December 1948).

39. D. N. Dhanagare observes : 'The tebhaga revolt ... never assumed the serious proportions some claim. In fact, although the situation had potential for a massive peasant rebellion, it did not develop into one ... The reason seems to be that the tebhaga was only a struggle to obtain a two-thirds share of the produce for the bargadars ; the scope of the revolt could obviously not be extended beyond the limits imposed by the very nature of the issue' D. N. Dhanagare, op. cit. p. 172.

Contemporary documents⁴⁰ reveal the changing state of the peasants' mind, their increasing awareness of the bigger stakes in the struggle. What most struck outsiders visiting the scenes of the movement in its initial phase was the pervasive feeling of reassurance among the sharecroppers that they had broken free from their dependence on jotedars, that 'they are now wholly independent'.⁴¹ It was this sense of elation that their activities now reflected. Collective harvesting they now tended to regard as a kind of sacred festival. They compared it to their biggest festival—Kali Puja. The areas where the authority of the jotedars had been annihilated were symbolically called 'tebhaga' anchals' (tebhaga areas). The Red Flag of the KS now represented to them the only legitimate authority they now obeyed.⁴² Demands seldom voiced earlier were now unitedly pressed—for instance, the right to the village waste and the right to fish in the ponds so long recognised as jotedars' preserves. The Krishak Samities now claimed jurisdiction over village affairs. A striking feature of the consciousness of the rebel sharecroppers was assertion of autonomy also of the local authority of the raj, even before the local police decisively intervened in favour of jotedars on a large scale as a matter of principle.⁴³ Peasant organizations now claimed the right

40. An outstanding contemporary document is Somnath Hore's *Tebhaga Diary*, December 1946 (in Bengali) (The Tebhaga Diary, December 1946); *Ekshan*, Autumn Issue, 1388 B.S. (1981). It is based on his firsthand impressions of the movement in Rangpur. The *Diary* is all the more remarkable because of his superb sketches of peasants and peasant leaders. This passage and the first two passages of the next Section (13) are mostly based on it.

41. Hore's impressions are thus recorded: 'A persistent talk in the village is: "Liberty, peasants are becoming liberated". While entering the village in the morning I heard an adhiyar boy proclaim: "We are now free". I heard the same thing at night from the old and the young alike—they will be free soon; they aren't afraid any longer of the police and [jotedars'] hirelings'. pp. 14-15 of the *Diary*.

42. Red Flags were first planted to mark off the field chosen for collective harvesting. Two of the slogans of the participants were: Long Live the Krishak Samiti; Long live the Revolution. A popular song in the locality was: Red Salute, the Red Flag is yours, Oh farmers. *Ibid*, pp. 14 & 16.

43. Hore records the reactions of adhiyars to the admonition of a local jotedar that forcible harvesting constituted a violation of the law. They

to punish the erring jotedars. Such a claim utterly ignoring the jurisdiction of established law courts over disputes concerning property rights was inconceivable before.

(13)

The sharecroppers' initial success in a large number of cases in harvesting the paddy and stacking it in the places of their choice suggests that the jotedars did not yet then make up their mind to strike back on a scale which the massive threat to their authority would normally have justified. A chronology of the jotedars' reactions is difficult to construct, in view of their wide variations over the extensive area convulsed by the movement. Roughly two majorphases are identifiable, the scale of jotedar-police collaboration in devising repressive measures being the dividing line. Cases of police repression did occur even during the first phase. However, jotedars then tried also other measures to win over or to tame their recalcitrant tenants.⁴⁴

Jotedars even attempted compromises hoping thereby to pacify the defiant bargaders. The rebels were then in no mood to heed such mild persuasions. Jotedars then resorted to overt threats that barga leases would not be renewed with the offending tenants and credit in kind or cash would be stopped forthwith. The threat of abrogation of barga leases was normally the most potent device to subdue misbehaving bargadars, in the context of the chronic scarcity of land at the time and of the extremely limited opportunity cost of the labour of dispossessed bargadars. When even this did not work

poohpoohed the jotedar's citation of the law : 'What after all is the law ? The law is what we actually do. There is no other law worth the name. We form the Committee, the arbitration board : where the tyrannical jotedar misbehaves, it is we who would try him'. *Diary*, p. 13.

44. It is remarkable how jotedars, feeling baffled to realize that their old methods of dealing with adhiyars would not any longer work, candidly admitted their wrongdoing and eagerly sought to humour the rebel tenants. Hore records such an instance. A jotedar prohibiting the announcement of a tebhaga meeting of the KS by beating of drums in the local *hat* had to retrace his steps when peasants unitedly resolved to boycott the jotedar's hat. The *Hat Haratal* (market boycott) thus humbled the arrogant jotedar. *Dairy*, p. 7.

bargadars were threatened that they would be sued in the local courts for a criminal offence, looting of paddy. A shrewd device of a local jotedar points to the strength of the local Krishak Samity's hold over sharecroppers.⁴⁵ Pretending a change of heart the jotedar sought to work his way into the confidence of sharecroppers by expressing a wish to be admitted to the Samity. The unsuspecting bargadars agreed. Once admitted the wily jotedar began to claim a special position in the Samity because of his superior economic and social position. The motive was to use this clever ruse to get the Krishak Samity to accept a plan of his, which was actually designed to play off Muslim adhiyars against Hindu adhiyars. A KS leader saw through the fraud and the adhiyars were thus warned off the jotedar's trap. Jotedars sometimes sought to split the unity in the movement through insidious propaganda on communal lines, particularly where the sharecroppers were predominantly Muslims. For instance, the Muslim League sought to misrepresent the Krishak Samity as a Hindu and Congress organization, asking Muslim bargadars to switch their loyalty to the League.⁴⁶ This ploy did succeed to some extent in the context of the bitter Congress-League relations at the time, particularly where the KS did not have the proper resources to counteract this divisive ideology.

Why jotedars initially refrained from adopting overtly coercive measures still remains an insufficiently understood phenomenon. In some places at least it had something to do with the changed composition of jotedars in the recent years. The war years and the period thereafter saw the intrusion of considerable urban elements into the village as purchasers of ryoti holdings. Mostly non-residents they were unable to count on the coercive authority based on established social relationship in the village. Even the old jotedars, both big and small, seem to have been caught

45. *Diary*, pp 22-23.

46. Both the League and the Congress repeatedly told the adhiyars that the tebhaga was merely a 'Communist ploy to incite the peasants'. The propaganda had it that ownership of land would eventually be restored to peasants, even without their agitations, while the cost of the tebhaga would be severe police repression and widespread communal disharmony. *Diary*, pp. 8-12.

rather unawares by the determined defiance of their tenants on a large scale and hesitated to counter the threat by application of force, feeling that it might not be worthwhile after all. The reluctance of the local police to committing itself decisively to coming to their rescue was perhaps the most important reason for their diffidence.

The provincial administration then merely asked the local police stations to deal with the specific cases as they arose in accordance with the ordinary laws and did not, till about the publication of the Bargadars Bill in the *Calcutta Gazette* (22 January 1947), provide any general guidelines based on the assumption of the justifiability of suppressing the movement.⁴⁷ This seems rather curious in view of the radical orientation of the rapidly growing movement. A section of the Government was evidently sympathetic to the bargadars' cause. The strong anti-jotedar sentiment of some radical members of the KPP had of course much to do with this. Even the Muslim League warmly spoke of the aspirations of sharecroppers where they were Muslims. In fact the Government favourably responded to the movement, even contemplating to modify the barga system in favour of bargadars through an Ordinance in early January. The idea had to be dropped because of the peremptory intervention of the Governor, ostensibly on a technical ground. It would be improper of the Government, argued the Governor, to present the imminent session of the Legislative Assembly with a

47. For an excellent discussion of the reasons why the Government initially hesitated to suppress the movement and also why it eventually committed itself to the suppression see an unpublished paper, Satyajit Dasgupta, 'The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, 1946-47' (Occasional Paper No. 89, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta; December 1986), pp 35-49. Dasgupta quotes a Secret circular (18 January, 1947) from the Bengal Government to the 'officers responsible for law and order' asking them to see that their 'interference' in the movement 'must be reduced to the minimum. Thus officers of Government should not be persuaded to interfere and use force to prevent the bargadar from removing more than what is alleged to be his rightful share from the field or from taking the crop to his own house rather than to the house of the landlord. The remedy for such alleged breaches of an agreement is not the use of force by the police but the recourse by the party seeking relief to such legal action as may appear to them to be appropriate'. (p. 36).

fait accompli and thus to preempt the discretion of the Assembly to judge the matter in the way it liked. The real motive was not then disclosed. The Governor perhaps thought it indiscreet to concede the demand of a communist-controlled movement aimed against substantial landed interests.

(14)

The Bargadars Bill evidently reflected the sensitivity of the Government to the aspirations of restive sharecroppers. Even the KS did not mistrust the professed intentions of the Government, and publicized the essential contents of the Bill. Ironically, it was precisely this Bill which created the conditions that obliged the Government to retrace its steps. Again, under such conditions the sharecroppers' movement tended to develop autonomously of the KS leadership in several places.

From the point of view of the growth of the movement the Bill did constitute a turning point. The developments it set off point to the rebel peasants' perceptions of the crucial role of the authority structure that the Government represented in determining the fortunes of their movement. Conviction that Government was on the side of their adversaries tended to make them feel hesitant and cautious in planning their offensive, unless other circumstances reassured them. On the other hand, conviction that Government had been backing their cause emboldened them to confront their enemies, since they felt the enemies by themselves were no match for their united strength. Indeed, the pervasive mood of elation led them to read far more into the Bill than what it actually intended to do.

The Bill was widely interpreted everywhere as the official approval of their stand. They therefore readily inferred that the Government would not use at all its repressive machinery against them. They felt jotedars who had in the recent months been pushed to the corner and put on the defensive would now be further isolated.

Once this impression became widespread the character of the movement rapidly changed. The vacillating elements, including Muslim adhiyars misled by the Muslim League in some places, shying away from the movement till then for fear of repression by the police and of retaliation by jotedars, now eagerly joined it. In

expectation of radical changes from the Bill, even purely agricultural labourers, to whom the tebhaga demand had not much to offer, rallied behind the sharecroppers. Once owner peasants they were perhaps animated by the vision that the sharecropping system would collapse altogether, so that they would regain their lost lands. The objectives of the sharecroppers themselves changed. Those who had not before made bold to remove their crop to the common village yard went, under the new climate of resistance, as far as to take away by force the crop which they had recently stacked in the jotedars' yard.⁴⁸ Such a daring act was seldom attempted before, since this made them liable to the charge of the criminal offence of paddy looting. The rapid spread of the movement throughout Bengal made the jotedars' predicament only more glaring to them.^{48a}

48. As prominent KS leaders admitted, sharecroppers themselves took the initiative in this regard. They felt unless this was done they would forever lose the chance of getting their rightful share in the harvested paddy. They flocked to the local KS officers, asking for the approval of the KS of their intended move. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

48a. The Subdivisional Officer of Siliguri thus traces the increasing radicalization of the movement following the publication of the Bill: 'Reports of Tebhaga movement in neighbouring districts together with the publication of the news that a bill was going to be introduced in Assembly session to fix the bargadars' share as 2/3rds gave a great impetus to the movement and the bargadars who are illiterate were led to believe that their demand for 2/3rds of the produce was just and was being recognized by Government... The report of the bill undermined the jotedars of the affected area who are also not sufficiently literate and they thought that the bill, when passed into an Act, will be given retrospective effect so far as produce of this year is concerned. They did not therefore venture to organize themselves to challenge the Tebhaga movement of the communists and were feeling helpless. This attitude emboldened the communists who lost no time in exploiting the situation and in imbibing the spirit of lawlessness and violence among the illiterate classes whom they bring into their fold.' (Secret Letter to the Government on the Tebhaga movement, dated 4, March, 1947. Land & Revenue Department, Land Revenue Branch, File No. 6M-38/47, 8 December 1948).

Even in a subdivision like Bogra where the movement was relatively weak and rather 'localized ... the promised Tebhaga legislation has created a flutter in the hearts of all bargadars'. ('Secret' Report on the Tebhaga movement from the Subdivisional Officer of Bogra, dated 10 March 1947. Reference as above).

The rather abrupt widening and intensification of the movement made the State completely reverse its earlier stand in regard to it and also created conditions in which the KS could not as directly guide and control it as it had initially done.

The government now gave up its earlier non-committal attitude in regard to the rebels and decisively intervened in favour of jotedars, clearly instructing the local police to suppress the movement as a matter of principle and relying on the army where the police could not cope with it.⁴⁹ The landed interests in the Muslim League government at the time had evidently a notable role in influencing its decision.⁵⁰ It would, however, be misleading to explain the change solely in terms of the class interests of the ruling elite. The government did admit to having come under the combined pressure of zamindars and jotedars, and in the rapidly changing political scene in the country, to which we turn soon, the government thought it unwise to antagonise the powerful social group representing landed interests.

Jotedars all over the province feared that enactment of the Bill would preclude all chances of their retrieving the lost ground in the recent months. Widespread as the movement had been, its outcome

49. Dasgupta argues that the Government unduly exaggerated the alleged radicalism of this phase of the movement. However, its decision to suppress the movement was based on its conviction that a radical swing in the movement had abruptly occurred. The Government feared the new militancy was not confined to the specific tebhaga movement. "In view of the growing unrest in the country, not only among the peasants and the labourers, but also among Government employees and the Armed forces, the CPI thinks that an opportunity will present itself very soon for the realization of its ideal of the seizure of power by armed revolution" (Intelligence Branch Report dated 17.2.47, Quoted in *Ibid*; p 45). When exactly the 'State terrorism' was let loose on a big scale is difficult to determine. A point of view expressed in the 'Meeting of Council of Ministers' held on 18 March 1947 was as follows: "Whatever the fate of the Bill, the position could be made clear to the local officers that they should use the criminal law for the maintenance of peace and order but not to fight a purely agrarian movement". (For reference see Footnote No. 48a)

50. S. Bose observes: 'The implacable hostility of about 40 Muslim League MLAs who were rich jotedars ensured that the government was never able to introduce the Bill in the legislature'. S. Bose, *op. cit.* p 269.

was not yet a certain doom for them. They did retreat in some cases under the circumstances, but they felt the storm would soon pass over; and the greater effectiveness of the police would enable them to overcome their difficulties. However, once the new law formally conceded the tebhaga demand such a possibility would be gone for ever.

The changed attitude of the government had also much to do with its political calculations in the context of the declaration of the British government (February 1947) about the imminent transfer of power. The Muslim League, keen on strengthening its political power, calculated that allowing a radical peasant movement, largely controlled by the Communist Party of India, whose political and social philosophy was sharply at variance with its own ideology, to grow would undermine the social base of its strength.⁵¹

The publication of the Bill and the increasing severity of the counter-offensive of the jotedar-police combine created conditions in which the earlier kind of the KS links with the rebels tended to weaken in some areas, and the sharecroppers' movement tended to continue autonomously.

In view of a widespread impression that links with the formal organization of the KS and the CPI greatly harmed the increasingly radicalized tebhaga movement it would be relevant to analyse the background to the emergence of autonomy in the peasant insurgency and to assess the bearing of the KS role on the eventual reverses suffered by the movement. Evidently, it was largely under the

51. Assessments of the political situation at the time by some KS activists may be cited here. Sunil sen (op. cit. p 68): 'Peaceful transfer of power was in the offing. At this point agrarian unrest appeared to be the only obstacle in their [the ruling elite's] path and had to be smothered. The Bargadars Bill was buried. Scared by the sweep of the agrarian struggle the Muslim League leaders chose to be representatives of law and order, and sought to crush the movement with wholesale violence'. Sachindu Chakravarty (Footnote No. 12; the book marked (i), p. 120): 'The Muslim League regarded opposition to the tebhaga and the peasant struggle as one of the steps towards the creation of Pakistan.' Peter Custers also concludes on the basis of his research findings: 'It was precisely when it had been assured of future power that the Muslim League Ministry made up its mind: the whole weight of the State's armed might then came on the agrarian movement.' (P. Custers, op. cit. p 114).

guidance of the KS and its local activists that the movement went from strength to strength till about the publication of the Bill. Thereafter the relationship changed somewhat. Sharecroppers and the KS seem to have differently perceived the implications of the Bill for the movement. As the KS leadership candidly admitted, the publication of the Bill made it feel somewhat complacent, leading it to assume that the Government would fulfil its promise, and the *tebhaga* demand might well be achieved even through a subdued movement. On the other hand, sharecroppers interpreted the Bill as the official verdict on the unsuitability of the *barga* system under the circumstances and regarded it as the signal, at the right moment, for intensifying their movement, so that *jotedars* would be forced to mend their ways.⁵²

52. This contradicts the following conclusion of Dhanagare: '... once the temporary Bargadars Bill was gazetted, it had at least partly taken the wind out of the sails of the bargadars'. (D. N. Dhanagare, *op. cit.* p. 173) There is scarcely any doubt about the rapid growth of the movement following the publication of the Bill, except in a few places. Historians have sometimes confused this feature of the movement with its 'militancy' and the alleged lack of militancy in it has led them to underestimate the strength of the movement in this phase. The assumption is that one 'might expect' 'much bloodshed ... in a peasant insurrection'. (Dhanagare, *ibid.* p. 169). 'Encounters with the police, attacks on government buildings and landlords'/jotedars' houses were, in fact, very few'. (*Ibid.*) 'The total number of peasant killed in scuffles with the police did not exceed fifty, although 3,119 arrests were made, which is a considerable number', (*Ibid.* p. 172). Encounters with the police were not in fact 'very few', as the number of arrests amply shows. The encounters were of course grossly unequal. Why should there have been attacks on government buildings? Resisting the police counter-offensive was what mattered most at the time, and the rebel actions were primarily aimed at scaring the police sent to stop forcible harvesting by bargadars off the paddy field. Attacks on remote police *thanahs* were not perhaps considered as effective. Similarly, the collective show of solidarity of bargadars was enough, till the systematic police and army intervention in favour of *jotedars*, to subdue the haughty *jotedars*. The eventual counter-offensive on a large scale was only partly initiated by *jotedars*' hirelings. Violence against *jotedars*' persons and properties were of limited value in frustrating the might of the police and the army. Satyajit Dasgupta also refers to the rarity of the cases of plunder of *jotedars*' property and murders of *jotedars*, by way of arguing that the post-Bill movement was not actually 'becoming more militant in nature'. (S. Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, p. 48).

As it soon turned out, the KS confidence in the good faith of the Government was misplaced. Jotedars' counter-offensive came before long, which essentially was use of the repressive machinery of the local police. Sharecroppers realised that the only means of retaining their earlier gains was to counter violence by violence. It was indeed a difficult decision for the KS to make if it would agree to go as far as the rebels wanted.

We consider here the argument that the sharecroppers now acted independently of the KS and that the hesitation of the Sabha on the issue of an armed encounter greatly weakened their movement.

It did happen that where the KS organization was altogether non-existent or not strong enough to cope with the needs of the rapidly changing movement, sharecroppers chose their line of action.⁵³ However, where the KS had recently worked closely with sharecroppers, it was invariably to the KS leadership that sharecroppers turned for advice, and in only a few cases did they defy the KS leadership and choose the kind of violence which the KS did not approve.

It is notable that the KS seldom asked the rebels to eschew violence of any kind.⁵⁴ It opposed only the use of firearms, forcibly seized from the police or brought from elsewhere. It preferred to rely in general on the collective use of lathis and on bows and arrows in the tribal belt. Where sharecroppers seized fire arms from the police force sent against them, the Sabha advised them to hide

53. Abani Lahiri (op. cit. p 154) did admit that in the absence of a central directive as regards the question of suitability of armed resistance bargadars themselves initiated the resistance, often in consultation with the local KS activists. Sunil Sen had a similar experience to record: 'The immediate question was if and how to resist police repression. There was no directive on this question and the movement was allowed to drift'. (Sunil Sen, op. cit., p 62).

54. Though, on their own admission, the Bargadars Bill made KS leaders somewhat complacent, the leadership scarcely ever thought in terms of giving up the peasant struggle. A section of the leadership did anticipate the imminence of the jotedars' counter-offensive, and made a strong plea for intensifying the struggle. In fact prominent leaders like Bhowani Sen stressed the need for building up a broader peasant struggle around more radical slogans, such as abolition of the zamindari system and 'land to the tiller'.

them or just to throw them away in ponds or rivers. Only once did the KS yield to the pressure from the rebels and adopt a plan to train kisan cadres in the use of arms. Even this, understandably a modest plan, could not be carried out, since the police came to know of it. The Sabha did not repeat the attempt.⁵⁵

The reason why the Sabha was averse to the armed encounter which rebels in some areas wanted had not anything to do with any of its immediate political programmes obliging it to disapprove of the alleged peasant radicalism. The Sabha felt it would be a hazardous move to go along with the extremists particularly after the State had gone fully over to the side of jotedars. Seizure of arms from the police only occasionally occurred, while the police and the army had an unlimited access to arms. To push peasant cadres, insufficiently trained in the use of arms and having only a fitful supply of arms to count on, to armed clashes would amount to exposing them to risks of utter annihilation in a grossly unequal fight. The heavy casualties suffered by the insurgents in the actual cases of such encounters amply justified the KS forebodings.⁵⁶

The KS strategy was not to curb peasant militancy as such, but to ensure that ill-considered adventurism might not lead to costly defeats, which inevitably created widespread demoralization among cadres. Such a militancy would have made sense where conjunctions of circumstances would have made jotedars' rural control and authority vulnerable. Such a likelihood nearly disappeared with the repressive apparatus of the State firmly committing itself to the defence of jotedars' property right. It was this sense of reassurance that accounted for the increasing virulence of their counter-offensive. On the other hand, the anti-jotedar resistance had its serious weaknesses. The movement was not designed to unite all sections of the peasantry under it. In fact it was not feasible under the circumstances. The tebhaga demand itself would inevitably alienate relatively substantial and even small peasants, whose income derived to a

55. Sunil Sen, *op. cit.* pp 61-62.

56. There were clear signs that the severe police repression was demoralizing the rebels. In this context the increasing communal tension and the recrudescence of communal violence (March 1947) made it difficult for the KS leadership to plan a united movement of Hindu and Muslim bargadars.

considerable extent from barga arrangements. The tebhaga demand could unify more or less the entire peasant community only where jotedars controlled the large portion of the village lands, as in some parts of northern Bengal. The sharecroppers' own position was not such as would sustain a protracted movement against powerful adversaries. The war, the famine and connected developments had steadily impoverished them, leaving them hopelessly dependent on jotedars for land and for much of the credit they badly needed. Where other agencies, such as itinerant grain-merchants, did provide part of the required credit, jotedars' position in relation to bargadars was scarcely weakened. Some celebrated short stories⁵⁷ of Nani Bhowmik faithfully capture the contemporary mood of many a destitute bargadar, who had recently become nearly indistinguishable from agricultural labourers. The dream that still motivated their hardest possible labour was possessing some holdings worth the name, and they hoped they could scrape together enough resources for buying bullocks etc. without which they would not be given any land on a barga lease. Beyond the sharecropping system they could not look for any opportunity for rising to the status of a *grihastha*.

(15)

In tracing the history of sharecroppers' struggles since about the end of the Second World War we have particularly stressed the decisiveness of the role of the KS in them. The reason, as explained above, is that except for their isolated members the Congress and the Muslim League hardly ever backed these struggles. Indeed, as the *Tebhaga Diary* of Somnath Hore reveals, sharecroppers regarded them as inveterate antagonists of their cause.⁵⁸

57. Particularly 'Dhankana' (Harvesting) and 'Girasthi' (Householder, Owner of a plot of land) in the collection of short stories *Dhankana* (First Edition, 1953 ; Second Edition, 1988).

58. Somnath Hore, *Tebhaga Diary*, op. cit. p 31, Entry dated 23.12.46 : 'wherever I have been I have noticed how utterly contemptuous peasant masses are about the Congress and the League. Hindu adhiyars regard the Congress as enemy. Similar is the impression of Muslim adhiyars about the Muslim League. They presume the Congress and the League are the jotedars' refuge'.

The stress on the association of the rebel bargadars with the KS is not intended as an argument that this association wholly determined the shape of the organization of their movements. We have so far omitted to analyse if peasant social organizations themselves might have affected the shape.

We need to make this analysis in view of an impression, which Cooper shares, that 'primordial loyalties' of peasants did play a 'significant role' in the organization of their movements. The analysis may also indicate how an element of autonomy in a peasant movement may survive its integration into 'organized politics'.

Cooper thus clarified the meaning of the phrase 'primordial loyalties': 'Bengali peasants identified in terms of caste, religion or tribe; in relation to land, as landholder, dispossessed or landless. Sharecroppers were a very heterogeneous group, and could organize on class or community basis when protesting about their oppression'.⁵⁹ Dhanagare also considers the notion of 'primordial loyalties' relevant to our understanding of the tebhaga movement: '... the agrarian classes in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, were only partially isomorphic with the 'community-based' social categories, such as types of religion, tribe and caste. Each class category was not homogeneous in terms of its religious, caste and ethnic composition, nor did members of one single, 'community-based' category belong to the same socio-economic stratum (or class situation)'.⁶⁰

'Such interpenetration of one set of categories by the other', argues Dhanagare, 'must have posed enormous problems for Kisan Sabha leaders in building up a 'class' organization and launching the tebhaga as a 'class' movement'. As an illustration of how appeals to 'primordial loyalties' and their manipulation tended to erode the unity of the class struggle he noted the diminishing hold of the KS over the Muslim bargadars as a result of their ever increasing support for the Muslim League which then upheld the idea of a separate nation for Muslims.

59. Cooper, p 249.

60. Dhanagare, op. cit, pp 171-172.

Dhanagare has mainly analysed how the alleged primordial loyalties prevented the making of a united class struggle. The implications of the notion for the organization of the peasant struggle were, however, wider and more complex.

The sense in which the notion is properly applicable needs to be explained.⁶¹ It is sometimes wrongly used in the sense of an unchanging tradition, as if the sense of identity with caste, religion, tribe etc. remains for ever immutable. Consciousness of identity continually assimilates new experiences, and it is in their light that people comprehend, reinterpret and even recreate the tradition. Therefore, what looks like primordial is not actually so. Sense of identity also implies a sense of distance, of distinctiveness in relation to other groups, and the new experiences which affect the sense of identity take shape in the context of these relations. The effectiveness of the sense in determining the nature of particular human actions, therefore, depends on the composition of the other groups. The identity may create a sense of solidarity in certain types of actions in regard to a particular group, while it may be ineffective where a different group is involved.

We cite a few illustrations of how social categories like caste, tribe and religion affected the actions and attitudes of the rebel bargadars, such as the Rajbangshis, tribals and Muslims, during the tebhaga.

A specific form of articulation of the Rajbangshi sense of identity was loyalty to the Kshatriya Sabha, founded at the beginning of the twentieth century by Panchanan Barman as the basis of a religious reform movement. The movement owed its spread to the initiative of relatively well-to-do Rajbangshis, who sought to raise their

61. I would particularly refer to the perceptive observations of Partha Chatterjee, (*Bengal 1920-1947: The Land Question*, Calcutta, 1984). '... a fundamental feature of the class demands of a peasantry is its articulation not in terms of a shared aggregate of interests but as the demands of a community united by pre-existing bonds of solidarity, whether real or imaginary and imputed. The bonds which are believed to define the community are not immutable, and therefore it is misleading simply to call them 'primordial' or 'traditional'. These are historically evolved solidarities and are subject to change, sometimes extremely sudden change'. (p. 208)

ritual status in the hierarchy of the Hindu caste system. The Sabha was not a closed community. Any Rajbangshi paying a fee of two rupees and a half was admitted. The movement became widespread and powerful enough to make the higher castes recognise the status the Rajbangshi community now wanted. The members started wearing the sacred thread, barbers served them and Brahmins officiated in their religious ceremonies. They gave up eating 'impure meat' i. e. meat of porks, fowls and hens, and increasingly abandoned one of their old 'lowly' occupations, carrying of palanquins.⁶²

Consciousness of their low caste status and the aspiration to move up in the caste hierarchy in order to remove this stigma thus created the consciousness of identity symbolized by the Kshatriya Sabha. The Sabha was thus a caste institution and not a class-based association, since it represented incompatible class interests, interests of well-to-do jotedars, affluent peasants, marginal farmers and sharecroppers. In the regions where Rajbangshi jotedars constituted the dominant social group the Sabha could scarcely prevent occurrence of conflicts between them and Rajbangshi adhiyars. These jotedars only marginally relied on the moral authority of the Sabha in trying to persuade Rajbangshi adhiyars not to join the tebhaga agitation. They had now powerful political networks to depend on, for instance, their connections with the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha.⁶³ However, the fact that adhiyars of a region largely belonged to the Rajbangshi community, now conscious of their identity as a community, greatly facilitated the work of the KS in organizing them for political battles (such as the election of Rupnarain Ray, a Rajbangshi peasant, to the

62. F. O. Bell, op. cit. p. 128. Bell came to know of these features of the movement from a Rajbangshi peasant whom he met on 29.11.1939. About the alleged scriptural basis of the Rajbangshi claim to Kshatriya status see Charu Chandra Sanyal, *The Rajbangshis of North Bengal* (The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1965). Sanyal argues that Panchanan Barman's claim of Kshatriya status for the Rajbangshis 'at a time when Rajbangshis of North Bengal were going out of the Hindu fold and embracing other faiths, saved the Northern Rajbangshis from leaving the Hindu fold'. pp 17-19.

63. Cooper, 257.

Legislative Assembly in 1946) and for the tebhaga. The Kisan Sabha thus gained ground at the cost of the Kshatriya Sabha. Sunil Sen thus writes of his experience about this intensifying conflict: 'The Kshatriya Samity.. quite powerful for years, became moribund after the 1946 election, and was virtually effaced during the tebhaga struggle... The work of the Kisan Sabha among Rajbangshis has achieved permanent result; even to day [1972] the Kisan Sabha in north Bengal is based on them'.⁶⁴

Thus while the Kshatriya Sabha had no role whatsoever in organising the tebhaga rebels, it would perhaps be going too far to say that 'Allegiances of caste and community were of little relevance'.⁶⁵ The community consciousness among the numerically predominant Rajbangshi adhiyars in certain localities had not yet crystallized in the formation of any organization appropriate for largescale mobilization. Yet the existence of a such a consciousness made for a sense of solidarity among them when they came to be involved in anti-jotedar struggles.

It was in the tribal areas that the sharecroppers' struggles and their aspirations were most effectively expressed in terms of their consciousness of an entire community i.e. a distinct ethnic group. The basis of the primordial loyalty (in the qualified sense in which we would prefer to use the phrase) remained here largely unimpaired. The tribal religious and moral beliefs, rituals, social practices, communal organizations, in fact, the sense of a collectivity, survived their experiences as migrant cultivators in regions dominated by alien jotedars and landlords and were actually reinforced by them. As we have noted above, their exposure to Hindu religious beliefs and political organization only marginally affected their perceptions of the solutions they had thought out for the problems of their stark material existence. On the other hand, unlike the Rajbangshis, the tribal groups were still largely undifferentiated. Hence the absence of the conflicting networks or social relations which the existence of an exploitative system of economic domination tended to create and consolidate. This to a considerable extent explains the firmness of the tribal solidarity during the tebhaga.

64. Sunil Sen, *op. cit.*, p 85.

65. Sugata Bose, *op. cit.* p 258.

The nature of the interaction of the traditional tribal social organization and the KS during the tebhaga may be illustrated with reference to two types of regions : one where the KS had a fairly strong base and the other where the direct role of the KS in the movement was initially negligible.

Writing of his experiences as a KS activist in Dinajpur, which belongs to the first type, Sunil Sen argues that despite the persistence of a stable tribal social organization, the traditional village headmen only partially guided the tebhaga movement. The Santals (as also the Oraons) 'became organized in trade unions and the Kisan Sabha ; they were led and guided not by manjhis or village elders but by the leaders of trade unions and Kisan Sabha who were drawn from Hindu middle class ; instead of panchayets the trade unions and the Kisan Sabha won their confidence and stood by them as they rose to win partial economic demands'.⁶⁶ Basanta Chatterjee, a KS activist in West Dinajpur during the tebhaga, later recalled in an 'Interview' the significant role of a Santal leader Bhuju Tudu in the movement.⁶⁷ He does not indicate Tudu's position in the traditional leadership in the Santal society. For instance, we are not told if Tudu was a village headman. What is, however, striking is Tudu's long connection with organized politics, first with the Congress movement and later with the CPI. The Santal Volunteer Corps, armed with bows and arrows, which he organized, had a crucial role to play in the movement in Kaliaganj, Kushmandi, Itahar and other places. The harassed police force eventually agreed to a compromise : the police would cease firing from their guns and Tudu's party would stop using bows and arrows.

The tribal upsurge in the Duars is sometimes cited as an illustration of spontaneous self-mobilization of tribal rebels. As Sunil Sen admits '... there was no Kisan Sabha in the Duars ; the movement began all too suddenly and spontaneously'.⁶⁸ Sachin Das Gupta, a CPI activist of Jalpaiguri at the time, thinks alike : 'In the Duars an incredible upsurge occurred for which we were

66. Sunil Sen, op. cit. p 56.

67. 'Interview' dated 14. 6. 87 *Bartika*, op. cit., pp 47-48.

68. Sunil Sen, op. cit, p 56.

unprepared'.⁶⁹ The way the movement started there⁷⁰ confirms this impression. While attending a tea labourers' meeting Samar Ganguli, a CPI labour leader of Jalpaiguri, was abruptly asked by Oraon bargadars to start and lead the tebhaga movement there. Presuming that the idea of initiating then the movement under the KS leadership was rather premature Ganguli laid down what he himself called 'an impossible precondition' for his initiative in this regard : ten thousand volunteers must first be mobilized. It was evidently a pretext for putting off the movement, since, he believed, the condition could by no means be fulfilled. Ganguli was utterly astonished to find the very next day a mammoth procession of Oraon volunteers proceeding to the CPI office. Ganguli did keep his word. The movement started with a raid on a Muslim jotedar's grain-heap.

It looks like an instance of peasant self-mobilization ; but it was not entirely so. Oraon cultivators did not want anybody else than a CPI worker to initiate the movement. They did know of the CPI involvement in the tea labour movement, since the labourers were predominantly Oraons, and they had close community and, in some cases, family ties with the cultivators. Some of the latter were once tea labourers and were thus familiar with the style of CPI politics. It would, therefore, be wrong to think that the world of Oraon cultivators was a closed one or that they lay merely at the remote fringe of organized politics. The tebhaga movement had already been on in the neighbouring districts, and it had been sending off sparks all around. The Duars movement did start in a different way, but it was inconceivable outside the framework of mainstream CPI politics. On the other hand, the intensity of their bitterness against the jotedars and their firm communal solidarity made for the consolidation of their movement under the KS leadership.

The articulation of religion-based primordial loyalty and its bearing on the tebhaga movement in the Muslim-dominated areas was more complex in nature. Usually, the emphasis here, as we have noted above, is on the divisive role of the loyalty in the

69. Quoted from Sachin Dasgupta's 'Interview' (August 1983), in Peter Custers, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

70. Sunil Sen, *op. cit.* pp 56-57 ; Peter Custers, *op. cit.* pp 95-96.

movement. According to this line of reasoning this prevented the making of a united movement.⁷¹

What the KS activists themselves thought about the matter is relevant. Sunil Sen's experience is that the tebhaga remained by and large a united movement of Hindus, Muslims, Rajbangshis, tribals etc. 'Perhaps the single biggest achievement of the Kisan Sabha', concludes Sen, 'lay in the fact that it built a secular movement, and achieved considerable success in uniting peasants belonging to different communities on the basis of class demands'.⁷² Several other activists formed a different impression.⁷³ They tend

71. Dhanagare, op. cit. pp 171-72.

72. Sunil Sen, op. cit, p 84.

73. I have primarily depended on the three volumes of recollections of KS activists, edited by Dhananjay Roy. See Footnote No. 12 above. I quote a few of their observations. Bibhuti Guha notes the success of the Muslim League in making Muslim bargadars waver in their loyalty to the KS. 'Muslim peasants too joined the movement in many places ... Still, there is no denying the fact that Muslim peasants could not be drawn into the movement on as big a scale as the Rajbangshis and the tribal Santals'. The book marked (1), p. 24. Ajit Ray recollects how Maulavis recruited from different places sought to interrupt by pointless questions the tebhaga meetings which the KS activists were then addressing. Haji Danesh, a leading KS worker, had to be brought in to counter the Maulavi interventions. Ajit Ray concludes: 'Despite his efforts only a handful of Muslims joined the Krishak Samiti.' *ibid.*, p. 44-45. Ajit Ray also writes of the 'limited attendance' of Muslim peasants in the 'Peace Meetings' organized by the CPI and KS to dispel the communal ill-will of the time. He observes: "The League propaganda called the Krishak Sabha a Hindu organization. The Muslim 'comrades' present at the meetings were not regarded as 'true' Muslims." (*ibid* p. 64). On the other hand, as Ray's narrative of the movement shows, Muslim cadres themselves continually kept the KS leaders informed well in advance of the jotedars' intrigues to undermine the movement. (*Ibid*. pp 67, 72). Sachindru Chakravarti had a similar impression to record: 'Even after ten years of our movement the Muslim peasant class could not be fully drawn into it ... Many a Muslim cadre and leader joined the movement, but this apparently isolated them from the Muslim society ... At heart they were with the movement, but their fear of the possible reactions of Mollahs and Moulavis made them hesitant to come out openly in support of the movement'. (*ibid*, pp 117-18). Chakravarti explained it partly in terms of the fact that compared to the Rajbangshi and Santal societies affluent Muslim peasants had a



to believe that except in some localities a sizeable group of Muslim bargadars was not as consistently enthusiastic about the movement as other bargadars and also that vacillating elements among them were more numerous. However, most KS activists found that very many of the waverers crossed over to the rebels in the wake of the rapid spread of the movement following the publication of the Bargadars Bill; and that only in rare cases did they actively collaborate with Muslim jotedars in suppressing the movement.

How then to characterise the mentality of Muslim bargadars? Two things are notable here. First, it was to the Muslim League as a political party that they showed loyalty and not to Muslim jotedars as representatives of a class. Secondly, it was not on the specific issue of the tebhaga that the Muslim League commanded this loyalty. A wider issue was involved here: that of a separate Muslim State. As far as Muslim bargadars understood it, the two issues were not necessarily identical.

An important implication of the co-existence of the two distinct issues was the persistence of an element of tension in the Muslim mentality, tension between two identities: a locality-based class identity and a supra-local 'national' identity. Initially, Muslim bargadars were not quite conscious of the potential conflict between the two loyalties. In fact the way the Muslim League preached the idea of a separate Muslim state made Muslim bargadars regard it as a cure for all of their sufferings, while at the same time the commitment of the Kisan Sabha to the tebhaga cause endeared the Sabha to them. This was the reason why Muslim bargadars did not find it incongruous at all to carry the League's flag with the symbols of the Kisan Sabha's Red Flag often inscribed on it. The Kisan Sabha's ideological campaign seldom clarified how its objectives and ideals differed from those of the Muslim League. Some KS leaders later admitted this serious lapse in its political

much greater influence on the rest of the Muslim peasant society. The KS leader of Rangpur had also to cope with the sinister designs of jotedars, both Muslim and Hindu, to destroy the unity in the movement. See Foot-note No. 12; the book marked (2); pp 57, 75, 88.

education programme.⁷⁴ In fact the CPI's own narrow and mistaken understanding of the Pakistan idea contributed to the confusion over the issue. It was this lack of clarity in the political understanding of Muslim bargadars that the Muslim League fully exploited. While they often baffled the sinister plans of Muslim jotedars to split the unity in the movement by playing off one community of bargadars against the other, the ingenious propaganda of the Muslim League beguiled Muslim bargadars into believing that the League would be their saviour. To what extent the League propaganda that the Kisan Sabha was as much a Hindu organization as the Congress misled Muslim bargadars is not known. However, the preachings of the local Maulavis, who even normally considerably influenced the mode of thinking of Muslim masses, were evidently far more effective in this regard.

Two things are notable here. First, the intensity of the movement in some localities where the bargadars were predominantly Muslims largely derived from the pervasive communal sentiments and sympathies. This, at least, was the impression of the Subdivisional Officer of Jhenidah in the district of Jessore.^{74a} On the

74. Abani Lahiri's candid admission may be cited: 'Even some peasant leaders did not quite understand the exact nature of the prevailing class relationship outside the immediate framework of jotedari system ... Peasants did understand, in the light of their individual experiences, the class nature of the local jotedars, but they lacked the right understanding of the nature of the relationship of the exploiting local class with the broader political organizations, the Congress and the League. This was a crucial shortcoming. The KS leadership had repeatedly to stumble at this level of national and class politics'. *Bartika*, July-Dec 1987, Special Tebhaga Issue, p. 149.

74a. The Subdivisional Officer thus observes in his Narrative of the movement: 'The movement started in August 1946 at the time of the Aus harvest. The activities of the Kusthia communists on the borders of Sailkupa thana seem to have stirred up bargadars who were already smarting under a sense of economic injustice. The local people actually organized the movement in the important areas and the response was spontaneous. As an aftermath of the Calcutta disturbances [August 1946] the movement unfortunately assumed a communal complexion because the majority of the bargadars were Muslims and the landlords were mostly Hindus. At one stage it appeared that the movement was being utilised as a weapon of economic communalism'. (Letter dated 10 March 1947. Land & Land

other hand, the KS leadership did clearly realize how such sentiments constrained its political choices, so that in some cases it backed out of its decision to start the tebhaga there, fearing that the movement might worsen the communal bitterness. Two instances of this are cited in the official reports on the movement.^{74b}

The intensification of the League's political propaganda harping on the Pakistan idea following the February 1947 declaration of the British Government about the imminence of Transfer of Power, the sharply increasing bitterness between the Congress and the League, the eruption of largescale communal violence again in late March

Revenue Department, Land Revenue Branch, Government of Bengal, File No. 6M-38/47, 8 December, 1948).

- 74b. The following passage from the Secret report on the movement from the Subdivisional Officer of Kushtia in Nadia district (dated 7 March 1947) may be cited first: 'It was started at Harinarayanpur Union Board ... Bargadars responded to it. It cannot be called a very spontaneous affair; neither can it be called a got up one. Communist set the ball in motion and the bargadars responded to it most zealously. But in this subdivision most of the landlords are Hindus and most of the bargadars are Muslims. October was a very trying time for this subdivision. Any spark could have set a conflagration ... So I had to interfere. The landlords were very bitter towards the movement. I had to preside over a very large gathering where representatives of the Communist Party, landlords and bargadars were present. I had to suggest a compromise, but as the movement might turn into communal both the parties, in order to avoid a communal trouble, agreed to the terms'. It is notable that bargadars had to give up the tebhaga demand (i.e. 66.6 per cent of the harvest) and had to be content with 56.2 per cent. (Reference as in the Footnote No. 74a).

The Subdivisional Officer of Bogra wrote of a similar experience (10 March 1947): 'The Tebhaga movement naturally had its repercussions in this subdivision ... In December 1946 local and outside communist leaders, presumably in keeping with their party plan, seriously started their operations among the low-caste Hindus residing in areas bordering on Dinajpore district ... The movement has failed to evoke sufficient response. The main reason appears to be the communal cleavage. The Muslim bargadars have not so far, joined the movement and the Communist leaders seem somewhat nervous in directing their operation against Muslim landlords who are numerous in this subdivision'. (Reference as in the Footnote 74a).

1947,⁷⁵ the widespread demoralization among bargadars in general consequent on the gradual collapse of their movement under brutal police repression and other developments increasingly alienated Muslim bargadars from the KS.

(16)

It has recently been argued that 'the 1946-7 sharecroppers' movement was limited in its spread and intensity and never assumed the massive proportions that current tebhaga mythology would have us believe'.⁷⁶

What exactly the phrase 'massive proportions' means is not clearly explained. Starting in Dinajpur, the movement sparked off similar movements elsewhere, till eventually about twenty-four districts were affected, six or seven of them, such as Dinajpur, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Khulna, Mymensingh, the Twenty Parganas and parts of Midnapur, more appreciably than the others. The movement, understandably, was concentrated in those localities where the sharecroppers (and also landless labourers in some cases) formed a sizeable section of the peasant population.

The opinion cited above is easily refuted if we talk of the question of the extent of the movement in a relative sense. The one thing that can be confidently said about the tebhaga is that its extent was unprecedented in the entire history of the peasant movements in the Bengal Presidency during British rule, except

75. Peter Custers (op. cit p. 84) quoted from Sunil Sen's Interview : 'the news (of the riot in March-April 1947) spread very fast among the Muslims and they started deserting the movement everywhere'. Peter Custers accuses the KS leadership of abandoning the idea of a peasant struggle to combat the growing communalism of the time and of concentrating instead on makeshift means towards promoting Hindu-Muslim unity. This, he argues, sharply contrasted with the CPI policy after the communal holocaust of August 1946. He called it 'a complete turnabout'. Custers apparently ignores the difference between the two situations. By the time the second wave of communal violence occurred (March-April, 1947) the tebhaga struggle had nearly completely collapsed. We have mentioned above other complicating factors.

76. Sugata Bose, op cit, p. 271.

for some movements of the Santal and the Munda tribals and the Indigo Rebellion (1859-60). If we choose only the sharecroppers' struggles, the tebhaga had no parallel whatsoever.

The question of 'intensity' is obviously far more difficult to decide. The intensity was unquestionable if we judge the attribute in terms of the strength of the movement's organization and also of its impact on the local power relations, at least initially. The strength of the organization, largely based on the effective coordination of the several groups into which the Volunteer Corps was divided, and on the firm resolve of the rebels not to give in, whatever the cost,⁷⁷ is partly inferable from their success in collectively harvesting the paddy and removing it to *Panchayet khamars*. The widespread feeling of shakiness among the bewildered jotedars demonstrates the intensity of the movement. Till the largescale armed intervention by the State in their favour jotedars nearly everywhere were visibly scared. Many of them either left their localities or felt hesitant to plan any counter-offensive. Some of them agreed to a compromise, willing to forgo part of their share rather than lose it altogether. It is remarkable that only a few powerful jotedars confidently struck back: others rarely tried to counter the organized might of sharecroppers by a show of force. Except where the local police came to their rescue they preferred to count on the available legal remedies (such as institution of criminal suits, on the ground of forcible harvesting of their paddy) or on shrewd devices for undermining the solidarity of the movement (such as those for stoking communal passions).

As we have noted above, the tebhaga, primarily an economic movement initially, gradually developed into a political struggle, having a conscious aim of establishing an alternative authority structure. In fact the jotedars' authority nearly collapsed in many localities till the Government intervention restored it. The movement was, naturally, at its most intense, where it had already a base

77. Somnath Hore, *The Tebhaga Diary* etc. One of the slogans that animated the Rangpur rebels was: *Jan debo to dhan debona* (We would rather be killed than surrender our paddy'. One of the KS workers used to tell them: 'We would face bullets when the police comes; retreat we won't': p. 6. The first slogan was heard everywhere.

to build upon and where sharecroppers had been familiar with ways of resisting the jotedar's authority. However, a striking feature of the movement was its spread to areas which earlier had only rarely witnessed sharecroppers' struggles. This and the presence of some common elements in the movement were largely because of the crucial role of the KS leaders and cadres in it.⁷⁸

78. Despite the questionable reliability of the Subdivisional officers' 'Secret' reports on the tebhaga movement, particularly on questions such as the initiative of the bargadars themselves in the movement and its extent and strength, they do bring out some striking features of the movement.
 - (a) The spread of the movement to new areas was inseparable from the efforts and initiative, in various forms, of communist cadres, despite the weak base of the KS there. Most of the officers agreed in regarding the role of 'Communist propaganda' as crucial in the beginning of the movement, which they tended to present as a 'got up affair' (a phrase used *ad infinitum* in the reports). They also emphasized the direct correlation between the arrest of prominent communist leaders and the diminishing strength of the movement. Police repression was primarily directed against the local communist leaders and workers.
 - (b) Where the movement was organized around the specific tebhaga demand, similar techniques were followed nearly everywhere towards its realization: violation of the usual terms of barga leases, flouting the authority of jotedars, harvesting the paddy and removing it to the panchayet khamar as fast as possible, and the crucial role of an organized volunteer corps in the whole process.
 - (c) Defiance of one aspect of the jotedar's domination often encouraged encroachment on other spheres of his authority, eventually leading to the radical stand that 'he who tills land owns it'. The Subdivisional Officer of Thakurgaon in the district of Dinajpur, thus describes the widening of the zones of rebel activity: 'From the 7th of February 1947, this movement took a more violent turn...'. In some places the movement took the shape of catching fish from others' tanks and taking away bamboos from others' bamboo clumps. The new slogan adopted was 'বেশল যার বাঁশ তার, পাল যার মাছ তার' which purports to say that the possessors of instruments for cutting bamboos and nets for catching fish have the right to bamboos of any bamboo clump and fish of any tank respectively'. (Letter dated 10 March 1947; Reference: as in Footnote No. 74a).
 - (d) Some earlier forms of anti-jotedar movement were revived in some places, such as resistance to collection of tolls from the village hats (Hattola).
 - (e) The tebhaga tended to stimulate other agrarian movements which had already developed independently of the sharecroppers' struggles. The revival of the Tanka movement in Mymensingh may be taken as an instance.

Our major arguments relating to the question of the KS role in the tebhaga may now be summed up. The question whether the KS may properly be called a peasant organization is immaterial.

- (f) Even where sharecroppers did not rally exactly around the tebhaga demand they now felt encouraged to press their jotedars to remove some of the gross inequities of the barga system, inequities resulting from the jotedars' methods of debt realization, from their insistence on the surrender of a fixed quantity of produce irrespective of the output and from arbitrary collection of abwabs.
- (g) In some places the increasing restiveness among sharecroppers, though not eventually crystallizing into an organized movement, scared jotedars into taking measures to salvage as much as possible before a worse fate befell them.

Here are *only a few* extracts from the subdivisional officers' reports. We follow the order in which the letters were arranged in the original File.

Chittagong Sadar (16 March 1947): 'Local communists generally organized the movement supported by the outside communist leaders. It could not make much progress in the place where the communist organizations have got very few followers; it made good progress in Patiya and Boalkhali P. S. which areas are full of communists.'

Jessor Sadar Subdivision (20.3.47): 'Communist workers held meetings and gave lectures inciting bargadars to oppose the landlords. They organized a band of workers...called Hashua Dal. They used to guard a plot of land in which reaping was going on. Communist flags would be hoisted on the four corners of the plot. Slogans such as 'Land belongs to the men driving the plough' would be shouted.'

Tangail Subdivision, Mymensingh (15.3.47): 'At first it was organized by the communists and then it spread to the local people. It has spread to almost all the parts of this subdivision and the bargadars welcomed it.'

Uluberia Subdivision, Hoogly (7.3.47): 'The Tebhaga movement is just having its repercussions here also and capturing the imagination of the people; for this also the Communist Party appears to be responsible.'

Tamluk Subdivision (6.3.47): 'The movement has recently gained in strength. Large numbers of cultivators are eagerly joining the communist party, or carrying out the behests of that Party, by clamouring for two-thirds share, carrying out a social boycott of landlords, attacking the police party when the latter goes out to investigate cases of reported theft of paddy or arson ...'

Ghatal subdivision (8.3.47): 'The movement ... is spreading throughout the subdivision gradually... A section of landlords are apprehensive and next year some of them are contemplating to cultivate the lands themselves or to leave them fallow.'

What really mattered was the nature of its role in the movement. Our discussion points to its cruciality and effectiveness. The assumption about the alleged 'externality' of the priorities which influenced the decision of the KS to be involved in the movement is also refutable.

Barasat Subdivision (10.3.47): 'From October '46 onwards Communist leaders from Bongaon subdivision joined the Krishak leaders of Gobardanga, and tried to foment the tebhaga movement; but did not succeed.... During the first week of February, '47 the communists found out a new venue of activity. They set up a Bazar Committee ... to agitate against the system of realization of tolls by lessees.... The committee has prescribed some rates of tolls and system of collection, which has been partially accepted by the lessees.'

Basirhat Subdivision, 24-Parganas (3.3.47): 'The whole movement is a got up show of the communist agitators... the movement did not progress outside the limited area in Sandeshkhali P. S. In almost every case the bargadars came along with other agitators 2000 to 3000 strong and carried off almost the entire produce leaving not more than one-fourth share for the landlord... They demanded of the landlords a receipt for one third share of the produce and their consent to this change.'

Diamond Harbour Subdivision (9.3.47): 'The movement progressed on account of the activities of the local members of the Communist Party... It took a firm and determined character when the bargadars were given to understand that the Government was taking up their cause and the Bargadars Bill was published... The present position of the movement is ominous.'

Satkhira Subdivision, Khulna (6.3.47): 'The rate of *Gulo* rent is very high, ranging from 1 md to 3 mds per bigha. The tenants are insisting on converting this into cash rent; this movement is of greater magnitude than barga movement.'

Narail Subdivision, Jessore (7.3.47): 'The landlords... are helpless. Some of them surrendered to them [bargadars] for fear of life and property. The landlords have not been given any share of the produce this year. The communist leaders want subscriptions from the landlords as a condition precedent for taking the produce on proper receipt.'

Narayanganj Subdivision, Dacca (8.3.47): 'The activity of the Tebhaga movement has now ceased, but propaganda in its favour spread to Adiabab union (Raipura P. S.) and Mahishasura union (Narsingdi P. S.), both of which are hotbeds of communists. In these two unions the communists... also started a campaign against payment of rent and union rates.'

An implicit assumption underlies the reservation about the status of the KS as a peasant organization and the argument that the KS motive in being involved in the tebhaga was only marginally connected with the specificities of the local peasant society. The KS, it is assumed, was a monolithic organization and its central leadership closely controlled whatever its local cadres would do. It would be misleading to judge the relationship of the central command of the KS and the local peasant initiative by the structural

Netrokona Subdivision, Mymensingh (7.3.47): 'The movement wholly affected some village of Singher Bangla and Kailaty unions of Netrokona P. S. The Communists have their strongholds in the villages where the movement was wholesale.... Towards the close of November the movement took the shape of lawlessness... when the bargadars along with large number of others headed by Communists were taking away the crops of the entire lands and in cases threatening the landlords with assault'.

Kishorganj Subdivision, Mymensingh (6.3.47). The Report described the attitude of the jotedars in the face of the tebhaga movement as 'Sheer helplessness. They all along depended on the police and government machinery.'

Jamalpur Subdivision, Mymensingh (9.3.47): 'The movement was practically confined to the bargadars near the Garo Hills within the Nalitabari P. S. The agitation was started by the Communists, but later on the Hajongs generally supported the movement... At this stage the landlords could not move freely in the area... The Hajongs were then asked by the Communists to cut Gujari trees belonging to landlords without any settlement with them... The police were then strengthened with the Eastern Rifles Contingents and unlawful activities were checked by the middle of February 1947.'

Mymensingh, Sadar Subdivision (12.3.47): 'There is no tebhaga movement at present... the bargadars, as it appears, do not like it because they find it difficult to get lands for barga cultivation. There are many cases where lands given for barga cultivation to bargadars in previous years have been brought under khas cultivation by the jotedars as a measure of safeguard against any fresh attempt in future by the communists to spread the movement.'

Sirajgang Subdivision, Pabna (8.3.47): 'The Tebhaga movement was mostly organized by the local people at the instance of the communists of Lahiri Mohanpur... Everywhere the bargadar seems to feel that his jotedar is having an unearned income, and that practically nothing falls to his share after deduction of cost of production. He has learnt to treat this movement as his own, whatever be the beginning.' (For Reference: See Footnote No. 7.a).

attributes of the KS.⁷⁹ Such a judgement implies that whatever happened at the village level was all foreseen and elaborately controlled by the central leadership. This was not how the sharecroppers' struggles had all taken place. A striking thing about them is the element of a certain autonomy in their origins. The perceptions of the local KS leaders and cadres were largely determined by the peculiarities of the local agrarian issues, such as the nature of the local peasant economy based on the system of sharecropping and the structure of sharecroppers' subordination in the context of the new strains on the sharecropping economy. As we have pointed out, it was not the central leadership of the KS which had initiated the tebhaga. Sharecroppers themselves were pressing the local leaders to start the movement, and the central leadership came to know of this increasing restiveness of the sharecroppers from the local KS leaders, intimately connected with their earlier struggles.

The crucial question is whether the KS leadership, after having agreed with the assessment of the situation by the local cadres, came to play a decisive role in devising effective means for organizing the movement, or whether it remained a mere onlooker from a distance. That the KS leadership firmly committed itself to the organization is unquestionable. If the organization was inadequate, as it later turned out to be, it cannot be blamed on any deliberate policy of the KS. The reason was partly that the KS central leadership could not quite anticipate the extra-ordinary rapidity of the growth of the movement. Furthermore, there was a limit to the expansion of the KS organization within the brief time available for it. It is notable that the movement, at least initially, largely succeeded in achieving its aims, despite the organizational weaknesses. If it was partly due to the absence of a concerted counter-offensive by jotedars, it was far from a result of any forbearance on the jotedars' part. The scale and intensity of the movement caught them rather unawares and made them realise the folly of an armed encounter with the rebels.

79. Despite the close links between the central leadership of the KS and its local units the latter were free to pursue activities which were consistent with the KS principles.

The particular interpretation of the Bargadars Bill by the rebels greatly stimulated the growth of the movement, except where they mistook the Bill for an Act formalising the acceptance of their demands by the State. The limited organizational resources of the KS prevented it from as closely controlling the movement in some of the new localities as it had done earlier elsewhere. The disapproval by the KS leadership of the growing pressure' from below for an armed resistance toward countering the ruthless repression of the movement by the State might have caused a breach between the KS and the sharecroppers. However, this pressure did not crystallise into a formal organization independent of the KS. The increasingly visible signs of a real breach began to appear largely as a result of the growing demoralization among the sharecroppers when they found their movement gradually disintegrating under the weight of the police repression. Some KS leaders admitted how the loss of credibility among sharecroppers they had thus suffered made it extremely difficult for them to rebuild their peasant base.⁸⁰ From the point of view of the sharecroppers' struggles and their links with the KS perhaps the worst consequence of this creeping demoralization was the steady dissociation of Muslim bargadars from articulation of their demands in class terms and their increasing conversion to the Pakistan ideology as the blueprint for a blissful future.

80. The Tamluk Subdivisional Officer had a similar experience : 'Just now the movement is in a stage of suspended animation... . In Union No. 1 of Panskura Police Station, where the police had to open fire after a violent mob attack, and the villagers left their homes in fear of arrest, the villagers are anxious to lead their normal lives again, and profess to be fed up with the communists who are alleged to have deserted them now. They have declared their decision of not succumbing to communist propaganda again. Signs of a similar attitude seem to be emerging in Union No. XVII also of Panskura P.S., but the signs are not very clear yet'. ('Secret' letter on the Tebhaga movement in the subdivision dated 6 March 1947. For reference see Footnote No. 74a).

BOOK REVIEW

Z. Hasan, DOMINANCE AND MOBILISATION: RURAL POLITICS IN WESTERN UTTAR PRADESH 1930-1980. (SAGE Publications, Delhi 1989) price Rs. 175/-

Zoya Hasan's study analyses the changing dynamics of 20th century rural politics in western Uttar Pradesh with special reference to the district of Aligarh. Her work is in tune with the recent analytical trend of connecting transformations in the political economy with political developments, thus departing from the Weberian framework of viewing power as partly or wholly autonomous of economic relations. According to Hasan the single important constituent in the transfiguration of the socio-economic base of the power structure in western UP has been the spread of capitalism in agriculture and the consequent rise of a class of rich peasants from the middle and backward castes who increasingly came to play a crucial role in the politics and economy of the province. The vested interests of this rich peasantry essentially assumed a class character but they preferred to mobilise themselves on both class and caste lines. It was this group which linked their fortunes first with the Bharatiya Kranti Dal and then with the Bharatiya Lok Dal and the Lok Dal, once the Congress with its upper-caste domination and a multi-class appeal failed to protect their interests. The demands of the rising rich peasants had a definite class content, but for political mobilisation they relied primarily on "precapitalist identities to reinforce domination and freeze class relations in a mould that sustains the hegemony of the dominant classes". (P-16) Hasan emphasises that both class and caste played an important role in the rural politics of western UP. The class interests of the dominant section in the countryside were concretised into a distinct political force through the mediation of caste linkages. One thus finds in Hasan's analysis an attempt to rectify Paul Brass's exclusive reliance on caste and caste coalitions in explaining the Congress and BLD politics. While Brass looks at the UP rural society mainly through caste ligaments Hasan prefers to use class analysis in understanding the manoeuvres of the dominant classes, the chief beneficiaries of the government's 'New Agrarian Strategy', in promoting their economic and political concerns. In Hasan's own words: "class analysis...enables us to grasp the ensemble of social relationships

in which individuals stand in relation to one another". (P-17) This is especially true in the context of the transformation of an agrarian economy to a capitalistic framework where the 'unholy' alliance between rich peasants and landlords frustrated such official reform schemes as land distribution programmes. The farmers' movements and mobilisation strategies in the UP have thus generally remained "vehicles of class mobilisation of the affluent peasantry, whereas the poorer peasantry are invariably left out of such calculations" (P-170).

Hasan, however, does not completely deny the importance of caste in UP society. The status order of middle and backward castes played an important role in the political mobilisation process. "The overlap of class interest and status enhances the significance of both orders in a way in which status serves the interests of class" (P-167), contends Hasan. She demonstrates how the 'status order' and caste loyalties helped the rich peasantry to draw upon the support of middle and small peasants from backward castes. They jointly formed "the solid plank of support" for the BLD. Political parties such as the BLD also consciously sought to arouse caste loyalties by adopting, what Hasan calls, "a caste-cum-class strategy". Class demands were formulated to attract rich peasants and caste appeals transcending class divisions were invoked to attract small holders and agricultural labourers from backward castes. Hasan also draws our attention to the problems arising out of this "caste-cum-class strategy" in creating voting blocs. For example, the over-emphasis on vertical mobilisation and use of ethnic identities diverted popular attention from class mobilisation and class issues and distorted class formations. Probably this method of political mobilisation explains the absence of agrarian radicalism in western UP compared to Kerala, West Bengal and other states. Hasan does not find any major 'initiative from below' along class lines in the UP and argues that such major shifts in the government's strategy as the Zamindari Abolition Act and the UP Land Ceiling Acts of 1961 and 1972 created the basic milieu for the rise of rich peasants in the rural landholding structures. She has thus qualified a popular notion of direct corelationship between technological progress under Green Revolution and political consciousness among the poor. In the UP a different set of circumstances hindered political

mobilisation along class lines, although there might have been the articulation of socioeconomic grievances.

Hasan sets the scene of her study with an analysis of the economy in western UP and an examination of the impact of economic changes on various social classes. The chapter on 'Evolution of Agrarian Relations 1840-1947' thus introduces the various land settlements under the British and demonstrates their effects on the traditional rural power structure and society. It has been argued that these agrarian changes did not cause any major structural transformation.

The third chapter deals with 'Land Reforms, Agrarian Change and Rural Power Structure 1950-80'. Here Hasan is concerned with three forms of governmental intervention in rural society—abolition of zamindari, imposition of ceiling on land ownership and Intensive Agricultural Development Programme—which brought about increased commercialisation of agriculture and consequent social differentiation, the Green Revolution and the growth of agrarian capitalism, the mechanisation of agricultural production, the increasing use of wage labour and market-oriented production. All these increased class tensions in the countryside which were not however expressed through class struggles.

In the next chapter Hasan examines the mobilisation strategy of the Congress between the Civil Disobedience Movement and 1946. The failure of the Non-co-operation Movement of 1920-21 resulted in a shift of political attention of the Congress from the urban to rural sector. Village meetings, district political and Kisan Conferences became channels for the Congress propaganda for reduced land revenue, irrigation and canal rates and the abolition of rural indebtedness. Attention has also been drawn to relative non-participation of Muslims in the Civil Disobedience Movement in areas like Aligarh. The Muslim alienation has been largely explained by a rapid deterioration of the general communal situation after the 1920s and the increased activity of the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha. Hasan has shown how this Muslim aloofness from mainstream nationalism reduced the Congress political activity in communally sensitive areas. The objective political situation also determined the Congress methods of political mobilisation. For

instance, the Aligarh district with a high degree of communal sensitivity witnessed a differential pattern of political movement from the relatively politically advanced regions such as Allahabad and Benaras.

The establishment of 'Congress Hegemony' on the one hand, and the 'Emergence of Discontent' on the other between 1947 and 1982 is the focal point of discussion in Chapter Five. Since the country's independence from colonial yoke a different set of political issues became important which made the Congress alter its mobilisation strategy, particularly in districts like Aligarh. Within the prevalent socio-economic structure of the UP society no single political tradition could develop and the Congress in the post-1947 period consolidated its character as a centrist party seeking to accommodate within it various groups with diverse political orientations. In this period the main challenge to Congress hegemony came from the Socialist parties which induced the Congress to adopt a double-edged policy which would deprive the leftist opposition of its slogans and at the same time would satisfy the right wing. In this context Hasan demonstrates how official attempts to reorder the agrarian society proved to be a useful method of diffusing class polarisation. The role played by the Zamindari Abolition Act is a case in point. It simultaneously safeguarded the class interests of former landlords and peasant proprietors and held out promises to the subordinate social groups of a reformed agrarian order. While the Socialists were weakened for the time being, the Congress could wean away some of their supporters by articulating similar grievances. But the inherent contradictions in the Congress policy of attempting to champion the cause of both the peasant proprietors and the rural power was bound to surface. It is thus not surprising that despite the impressive victory in the 1957 elections its support base began to crumble from the late 1960s. The Congress policy of imposition of Land Ceiling laws and redistribution of surplus land evoked strong opposition from rich peasant proprietors who now rallied around Charan Singh to defend their economic interest. At the same time, the failure to act as an instrument of fundamental social reforms created doubts among sections of the oppressed rural population about the sincerity of the Congress in building a new rural order. The Congress was thus caught in a dilemma. Hasan shows how at this juncture the

Republican Party of India tried to intervene in the political scene by advocating the cause of the weaker section of the society, especially the scheduled and backward castes. But its success was episodic because its mobilisation strategy was marked by an exclusive dependence on the Scheduled Castes. As a result the RPI was forced into a "casteist framework and failed to broaden its support base". Moreover, it could not incorporate broader political and economic issues in its mobilisation campaign but freely used caste and communal slogans.

Chapter Six is essentially an explication of the changes in the political economy in west UP from 1967 to 1974, the period which finally witnessed the rise of rich peasants within the provincial political structure. Hasan here establishes the crucial link between economic and political developments. While the Congress adopted the stance as the custodian of multi-class interests, the BKD emerged as the mouthpiece of the agrarian cause. Besides, the UP Congress leadership had come to be dominated by the Brahmins and upper castes. This pushed the middle and backward castes such as Jats, Yadavas and Kurmis also to look towards the BLD for a political alternative. A new "congruence of class and caste" occurred in the context of which the traditional Congress image as the champion of the rural poor lost its credence. Instead, Charan Singh, the chief ideologue of the new agrarian populism, was now hailed as the "avatar of the Krisans".

The Seventh chapter on "Social Conflicts and Rising Populism" analyses the political triumph of the Lok Dal in the process of which the contradictions between the rural poor and the landed groups were, however, heightened. Hasan convincingly demonstrates how governmental power was used to reinforce the influence of the dominant agrarian class against the rural poor and landless scheduled castes. The resulting social tension was reflected in the eruption of widespread caste conflicts specially during the Janata Party's rule. In 1980 the UP legislative elections were influenced by national trends and issues which resulted in the rejection of the Janata experiment and restoration of the Congress rule. Hasan believes that perhaps the electorate reacted to the rising social and communal tensions by choosing to vote for the party which "apparently worked".

The present study on the interrelations of caste and class in the political economy of western UP between 1930 and 1980 has a wider relevance. It makes us aware of the implicit danger in any attempt to whip up caste and ethnic loyalties for mobilising the support of different social sections in favour of a political party which seeks to represent the vested interest of a particular section of rural society. Hasan demonstrates the basic contradiction in a period of social transition when pre-capitalist consciousness of one group is used by another to enhance its class interest to the detriment of the general poor. Her study also reveals how the growth of agricultural capitalism increases the importance of political mobilisation in the countryside.

Zoya Hasan's work, however, suffers from a kind of economic determinism. She has certainly carefully charted the political rise of the western UP rich peasantry, a process which was paradoxically facilitated by the participation of the middle and backward castes. But she has not adequately explained how the rural poor were ultimately accommodated within the new political system. The revised power equation between the rich peasants and the rural poor could have been elaborated upon for a more comprehensive picture of the rural polity. Our understanding of the mechanism of the domination by the rich peasantry would have been also enriched if Hasan had integrated within her general analytical framework the cultural ingredients in the politico-economic hegemonic structure to which the rural poor in the western UP have been subjugated.¹ Besides, in dealing with 'sectional consciousness', Zoya Hasan also excludes possibilities of what Foster calls² such narrow identities triggering off class consciousness at particular historical conjunctures which, as researches demonstrate, did occur at many points of South Asian history. Nevertheless, the book under review has made a significant contribution to our knowledge of the changing contours of the political economy in a sensitive region of what is usually called the 'Hindi heartland of India'.

SUPARNA GOOPTU

1. For an analysis along these lines see D. Arnold, 'Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity in India'.

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2. J. Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* (London 1974).